

BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2004



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FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed)
Fred D. Pfening, Jr., publisher. (10-25-04).

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

The Blue Unit Train, The First Twenty Years

By Robert S. MacDougall ©

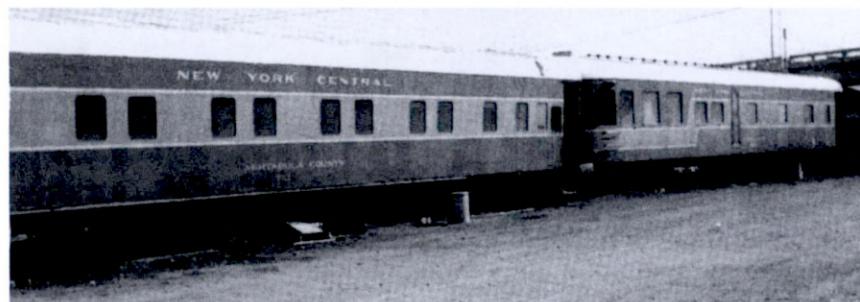
This segment of coach history will be a definitive study of the railroad equipment used by the Blue Unit from its beginning in 1969 and cover the first twenty years of operation.

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus that the Felds bought had begun its evolution in 1957 after it discontinued showing under canvas. The show tried many new venues, international as well as domestic. The show moved on trucks and performed in Canada, the United States and Mexico. It returned to using its own train in 1960.

Lloyd Morgan, Sr. organized the building of a new European unit and became its manager. It was framed similar to the stateside unit. Similar wagons were slightly longer than the stateside equipment because of the different rail equipment used throughout Europe. The title of the new unit was Ringling's Barnum & Bailey Circus. This unit operated from September, 1963, to March, 1964 throughout Europe.

The new show was not an overwhelming success. The tour was ended and the equipment was put into storage in Hamburg, Germany. All personnel returned to the states and Morgan was asked to organize and build a circus unit to play the New York World's Fair in 1964 and 1965. The circus touring the United States and Canada had grown in size and profits.

The train which started using 15 cars in 1960 had grown to 24 cars by 1967. The show moved its winter quarters from Sarasota to Venice at the end of the 1960 season. Over the next seven years the show gained creditability and success as an indoor circus. Various promoters were used to make arrangements and promote the circus in their cities. Super Shows, run by Irvin and Israel Feld, was one of the promoters that handled the circus in several major ven-



ues. The Feld brothers realized the potential the circus could have, having promoted for several years. They formed a partnership with Judge Roy Hofheinz and approached John Ringling North with an offer to buy the circus.

North accepted an offer to sell the show to the Hofheinz and Feld



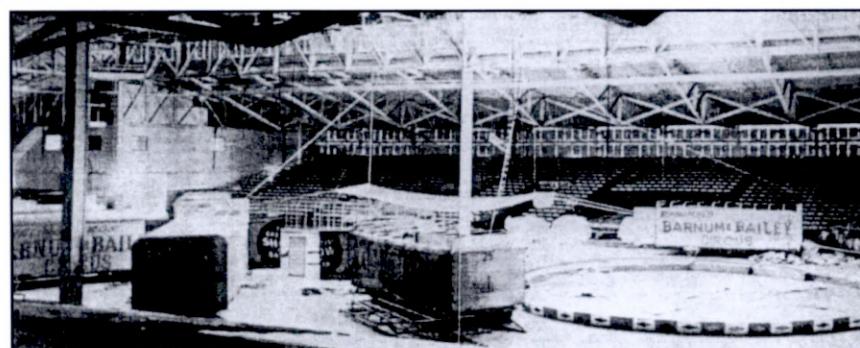
interests. The deal was signed in Rome's Coliseum, birthplace of the circus, late 1967. Feld wasted no time making his future plans for the

Two of the 20th Century Limited train cars purchased by Ringling-Barnum. Conway photo.

Greatest Show On Earth known. He announced the expansion of the circus to include two shows of equal size.

As the 1968 season began, plans were underway to assemble and operate the second unit. The news of Feld's negotiations with Circus Williams, touring in Germany, to be brought to the United States, ended with the press saying that Feld was buying Circus Williams. The show was the nucleus of the second unit of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The real truth was that a lease agreement had been reached between Carola Williams, owner of Circus Williams, and the Feld brothers. Arrangements were made to import the German circus to the United States.

Equipment from the European unit being unloaded in the Venice quarters building. Venice Gondolier photo.





One of the Ringling-Barnum European unit wagons in Venice. Conway photo.

The equipment used by the 1963 European Unit stored in Germany was gathered and arrangements made to ship the equipment state side. The rail equipment was a collection of cars from the famed New York Central's 20th Century Limited and the Rock Island Railroad. The railroad cars began to converge on Venice, Florida, the location of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's winter quarters. The wagons and physical equipment of the European Unit were ready to leave for the U.S. as well as Circus Williams with all of its animals. Featured animal trainer Gunther Gebel Williams was ready to leave Germany.

Lloyd Morgan, manager for Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, was in charge of building the new unit. The physical equipment arrived in Tampa on June 21 from Europe. The equipment was brought to Venice winter quarters where Morgan supervised the unloading and started the refurbishing and rebuilding of the wagons for the new unit. The European equipment was built in Illes, France by an unknown manufacturer. The wagons were very similar in design to the wagons built for the new railroad show in 1960. Twelve baggage wagons were built. They were slightly longer than their American counterparts, being made in 20' lengths instead of 16' lengths. The frames were made of bent steel shapes and covered with an aluminum skin. The wheels were a small diameter and used four to six wheels per axle, making the wagons a low profile just like the American wagons. Their low profile allowed them to meet European railroad clearances. The new unit

used flat cars instead of tunnel cars to transport the equipment

At a different location, nearby, the railroad cars were being gathered on a rail siding at the Seaboard Coastline's Venice railroad station. The first cars needed were the

stock cars, because of the arrival of the Circus Williams' animals, on board the *Atlantic Saga*, a trans Atlantic container ship that left from Bremerhaven Germany November 2, 1968 and arrived at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey on November 13, 1968 for off loading. The animals and grooms needed to be transported by railroad to Venice, Florida.

McCormick Steele was the general agent for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and worked out of offices in Venice, Florida. A letter from him on November 8, 1968 explains that, in part, "Horace J. McDonald, is the custodian of the company owned railroad cars Nos 130, 131, and 132 which are consigned from Venice, Florida to the Central Of New Jersey Railroad siding at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey

"These cars will be loaded with the animals and equipment arriving from Europe on the *Atlantic Saga* of the Atlantic Container Line due to dock about November 13th 1968 for return trip to Venice, Florida upon completion of loading. They will be attended by us.

"On the return trip there will be about twenty people from Europe, animal attendants and workingmen aboard the cars. Bunks and sanitary facilities have been provided for them. These people will be employees of ours."

The Circus Williams animals did not join the new Blue Unit but instead went on the original show which moved on 24 railroad cars in 1968, but added two additional cars the 1969 tour. One of these cars was one of the newly acquired Rock Island cars, RI #758 railway post office car, rebuilt into a tunnel car.

The acts from the 1968 show were integrated into both units. Gunther Gebel Williams' elephants, tigers, and horses traveled with the original show, now referred to as the Red Unit. Charlie Baumann's tigers and the Hugo Schmidt elephants traveled with the new Blue Unit. Lloyd Morgan, Sr. was the general manager and Tuffy Genders was the general manager of the Red Unit. The Red Unit opened first, featuring Gunther Gebel Williams, on January 6th 1969 and left for St. Petersburg, Florida a few days later.

Two Ready For The Road

Excerpts from an article in the *Venice Gondolier*, "Once Morgan gets the new unit's equipment into the shape he feels it must be in, he'll have them painted silver and lettered in red and yellow so all will know what they are. Then the second Greatest Show On Earth unit will be able to pull out of Venice, comparable in every way except for their paths.

"The show that's now called the Blue Unit will open here in March and follow an entirely new course, because it is a brand new idea. Whereas the first show will follow a northerly direction, this second show

A newly rebuilt Rock Island postal car ready to go to New Jersey to pick up Circus Williams animals. Conway photo.



will stay south, to begin with anyway. After playing two or three months, it will head for the Astrohall in Houston, Texas where it will play an extended engagement from May 30th to September 1st. The tour will resume, taking the unit all the way to the Pacific Northwest and Canada, returning in November to Venice, Florida."

The Cars

There were nine Rock Island cars and seven New York Central, 20th Century Limited cars available in Venice, Florida. An interesting fact is that eight of the nine Rock Island cars had previously belonged to the New York Central Railroad. This would make the new Blue Unit train all New York Central cars, except one original Rock Island car.

There were forty-five 22 Roomette sleeping cars, referred to as "compact sleepers" built by Pullman between December 1945 and October 1948 as Plan 4122, numbered NYC 10400-10444. The New York Central sold ten of the forty-five cars to the Rock Island in 1959 which rebuilt six of them into RPO baggage/mail cars, these cars were acquired by Ringling-Barnum. They were RI 754 (NYC 10440 Willoughby Bay); RI 755 (NYC 10409 Nahant Bay); RI 756 (NYC 10410 New York Bay); RI 757 (NYC 10413 Raritan Bay); RI 758 (NYC 10414 Saginaw Bay and RI 759 (NYC 10429 Jamaica Bay); Rock Island 754 became Ringling-Barnum Blue Unit 132 horse car; Rock Island 755 became Ringling-Barnum Blue unit 131 elephant car; Rock Island 756 became Ringling-Barnum Blue Unit 133 horse car, Rock Island 757 became Ringling-Barnum Blue Unit 124 tunnel car; Rock Island 758 became Ringling-Barnum Red Unit tunnel car #29 and Rock Island 759 became Ringling-Barnum Blue Unit 130 elephant car. Records show four additional cars RI 864 (NYC 10421 Birch Bay); RI 865 (NYC 10436 Jamaica Bay); RI 866 (NYC 10401 Cape Cod Bay) and RI

867 (NYC 10416 Peekskill Bay) were converted to baggage cars. All four cars were sold to RB&BB in 1968. None of these baggage cars were used in the 1969 train.

There were nine sleeping cars built by Pullman, which were ordered in December 1945 but not delivered until March-June 1948 as Plan 7543, numbered 8961-8969. They were 13 bedroom sleeping cars, referred to as compact sleepers.

The New York Central sold three of these cars to the Rock Island in 1959 which re-built them into baggage/dormitory cars. The cars were smooth side steel cars with a vestibule in one end. The Rock Island numbers were 821 (NYC 8961), 822 (NYC 8962), and 823 (NYC 8967). These three cars joined Rock Island 820 built by Pullman as Plan 7518 baggage/dormitory car. The Rock Island car 820 was assigned to the consist of the "Golden State Rocket." It had stainless steel fluting on its sides and no vestibule, but was a very similar plan to the NYC cars. When the stainless steel siding was removed, the exposed corten steel under body was rusted out, and the car was resided with galvanized sheet metal. This particular car became a problem. First, this car did not have its own vestibule, which meant the coaches on opposite ends of this car would have their vestibules placed against this car to provide entrance and egress to the car. Second, the galvanized sheet

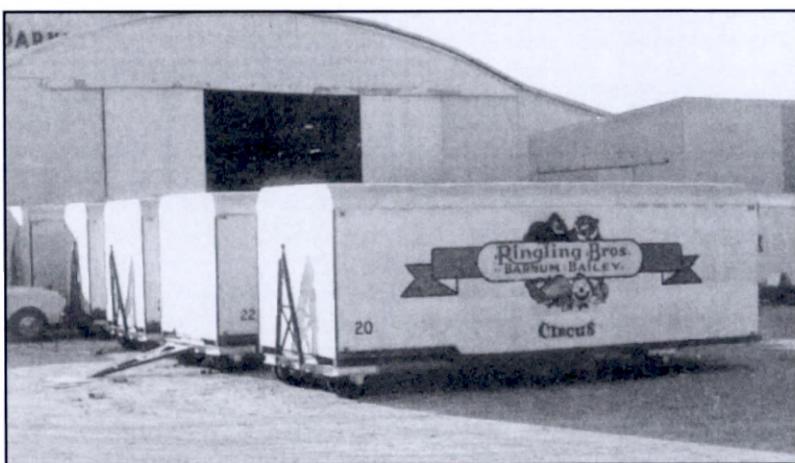
Newly lettered 1971 wagons in the backyard of the Venice quarters. Conway photo.

metal would not hold paint regardless of what type primer or preparation was used. These two problems existed as long as it was in Ringling-Barnum service. The baggage doors had been closed and the baggage area, 31 feet long, had one full width stateroom and two regular staterooms built in this space. The dormitory end was remodeled into two large double staterooms and two single staterooms.

The three similar baggage dormitory cars from the New York Central had smooth sides, vestibules and the baggage door removed. Ringling-Barnum remodeled Rock Island 821 into the pie car which took up 2/3 of the car and the unit's office taking up the other 1/3. Rock Island 823 had two diesel electric generators added. Large vents were cut into the car's sides and covered in with steel mesh panels which were removable for installation and servicing the generator sets. The dormitories remained, with one being used by the Bulgarian workingmen and the other used by the American workingmen. Rock Island 822 was remodeled similar to Rock Island 820, except the dormitories remained, to house the Polish workingmen.

The New York Central 20th Century Limited Pullman sleepers were from two groups of cars. Three were "County cars" and three were "Port of cars." The bullet shaped end design of the observation car Hickory Creek was the back drop for many photographs taken of famous people and movie stars. The Hickory Creek and its sister car Sandy Creek were the signature cars for the 20th Century Limited in 1948.

The New York Central "Port cars" were built to Plan 4125, 12 bedroom sleeping cars. There were nine cars in this series, built as Plan 4125. Ringling-Barnum acquired three, NYC 10500 Port Of Buffalo was R-B 148; NYC 10501 Port Byron was R-B 147; and NYC 10508 Port Of New York was R-B 146. All three cars were



used, as is, with 12 bedrooms. A donnicker was installed in the blind end of the car. The New York Central "County cars," were built to Plan 4071B. Ringling-Barnum acquired three, NYC 10534 Ashtabula County was R-B 140; NYC 10536 La Porte County was R-B 142; and NYC 10537 Elkhart County was R-B 141. All of these cars were used, as is, with 13 bedrooms, with a donnicker installed in the blind end of the car. The observation car was built to Plan 4126, 5 bedrooms, observation, buffet, lounge. NYC 10570 Hickory Creek (number changed 1958 to NYC 10633--retired 1968, sold to RB&BB.) This car became private car R-B 150 for Lloyd Morgan, Sr., general manager. There were three staterooms in the vestibule end of the car, used by performers.

A big difference must be pointed out at this time. The coaches that Ringling-Barnum had used from 1947 to 1972 were U. S. Army hospital cars. The military interiors were remodeled to circus use by using house type construction made up of 2x4s, plywood, steel, electrical and plumbing. The New York Central cars added in 1965 were chair cars and were remodeled the same way as the hospital cars. The acquisition of the Pullman sleeping cars from the 20th Century Limited and the Rock Island Pullman sleeping cars were pretty much used, as is, in other words, the staterooms, compartments, bedrooms, and roomettes that was the railroad's original equipment fit most of the housing needs of the circus performers and staff.

Some modifications were made to the electrical, air-conditioning and plumbing, but generally everyone traveled in Pullman car luxury.

The new Blue Unit used flat cars instead of tunnel cars like the Red Unit to carry the equipment wagons. Four brand new 89'-4" long piggyback flat cars with 70 ton trucks, Lot #1105242 were ordered from the St. Louis plant of American Car and Foundry Car Company (ACF). The cars were delivered as ACF 1 through 4, then given

Ringling-Barnum numbers 120, 121, 122, and 123. The show used one tunnel car to carry Charlie Baumann's tigers and the spec floats.

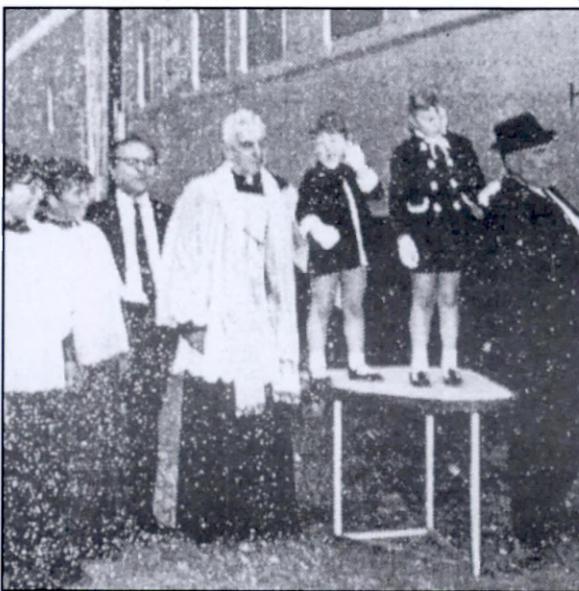
1969 Blue Unit Train Consist

Coaches: 140-NYC 10534 Ashtabula County, 13 staterooms; 141-NYC 10537 Elkhart County, 13 staterooms; 142-NYC 10536 La Porte County, 13 staterooms; 143-RI 822, 5 staterooms, 2 dormitories (Polish workingmen); 144-RI 821, Pie Car and Show Office; 145-RI 823, Generators, 2 staterooms, 2 dormitories (workingmen); 1-NYC 10508 Port of New York, 12 staterooms; 147-NYC 10501 Port Byron, 12 staterooms; 148-NYC 10500 Port of Buffalo, 12 staterooms; 149-RI 820, 4 staterooms, 2 double staterooms, one full width stateroom; 150-NYC 10633 Hickory Creek, 5 staterooms and private car.

Stock Cars: 130-RI 759, elephants, 12 bunks for animal men; 131-RI 755, elephants, 12 bunks for animal men; 132-RI 754, horses, 12 bunks for animal men; 133-RI 756, horses, 2 staterooms for Doc Henderson, Hugo Schmidt.

Flat Cars: 120-ACF 1, run car with diesel generator and electric winch; 121-ACF 2, 89'4" long piggyback car; 122-ACF 3, 89'4" long piggyback car

Father Ed Sullivan christening the new Blue train. Irvin Feld is on left and Lloyd Morgan on right. *Venice Gondolier* photo.



123-ACF4, 89'4" long piggyback car.

Tunnel Car: 124-RI 757, loads tiger cages and floats.

The Equipment Loading Order

Flat Car #120-Chevy pickup; #24 rigging; Unimog tractor, #25 open top wagon, track rubber and ring curb; Unimog tractor. Flat Car 121-Chevy staff car; #26 open top wagon, ring rubber and props; Clark tractor, #23 baggage wagon, electrical dept.; #20 prop wagon. Flat Car 122 Clark tractor; #15 wardrobe wagon; #21 trunk wagon; #18 wardrobe wagon; Chevy station-wagon. Flat Car 123-Spot light wagon; #17 horse department; #19 elephant department; #22 prop wagon; #16 wardrobe and office wagon. Tunnel Car 124-Center ring spec float; flatbed wagon spec props; shop wagon; 14 tiger cages; dog wagon.

"New Circus Train Christened In Venice, Florida," the Sarasota *Herald-Tribune* reported on Tuesday March 18 1969. "The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus' all-new circus train for the Blue Unit was christened Sunday afternoon by Rev. Edward Sullivan, known as the 'Circus Priest.'

"Father Sullivan, of Squantum, Massachusetts, official 'parish priest' of the circuses of America since 1924, had flown to Venice especially for the blessing. Also Participating in the ceremonies were Irvin Feld, president of the Greatest Show On Earth; Lloyd Morgan, new Blue Unit general manager; and Morgan's granddaughters Kellee and Kimberley Houser, Sarasota, who did the honors with a bottle of champagne."

"The first stop on the Blue train's tour of the United States and Canada will be Knoxville, Tennessee, where the circus will begin a five-day engagement Wednesday."

Unscheduled Stop

"Unscheduled stop for Ringling Circus Train. Investigators probing cause for Circus Train derailment! Investigators continued to seek the cause of derailment which sent two engines of the Blue Unit of Ringling Bros and Barnum &

Bailey Circus train into the sod in Sarasota.

"B. B. Vaughn, division superintendent for the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad, said a defective switch may have been at fault.

"Two of the three diesel units pulling the train left the tracks and struck a line of box cars on a siding, in the morning, near East Avenue and 10th Street. The train had departed its winter headquarters in Venice a short time before on a 10 month tour of the nation.

"No one was hurt in the mishap which delayed the train a few hours. Vaughn said the accident occurred as the engines went through a rail intersection.

"None of the cars in the circus train, which carried animals, performers and equipment, was damaged. Two hours after the accident the train, pulled by two of its three units, left the scene of the derailment and continued on its way to Knoxville, Tennessee.

"The lead engine halted entirely off the tracks while a second diesel unit was partially derailed. Work crews used wedges to set the second unit back on the rails.

"A rail crane was used to lift the lead engine back on the tracks. Vaughn said about 40 feet of track would be repaired by dawn today. Circus officials said the show will go on as scheduled." (*Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, March 18, 1969.)

1970 100th Anniversary Edition

The Blue Unit was given new production numbers and called the 100th Anniversary Edition. The Felds reached back into circus history, capturing the first involvement of P. T. Barnum's venture into the circus business to 1870, preceding the 1872 launching of the railroad circus with W. C. Coup and Dan Costello.

Irvin Feld needed something big to kick off the new Blue Unit Circus. It is interesting to note that whether by intent or accident the title on the original Red Unit, was called Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows and the new Blue Unit was titled Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Feld had an advertising agency come up with a new logo for the Blue Unit. It was



One of the coaches of the 1971 all white train. Gene Baxter photo.

the title in an oval surrounded with four cartoon type characters, a gorilla called "Ring," a tiger called "Ling," an elephant called "Barnum" and a clown called "Bailey." These circus characters performed to a catchy signature tune in Disney-like costumes while cavorting around the hippodrome track. Naturally, there were likenesses of the four characters sold in the concession stands.

This would start the tradition of alternating the Red and Blue units with new productions every other year, an attempt to present a new show to each city played, but getting two years out of each production.

The new edition would always play New York City's Madison Square Garden, the first season in the spring, around the Easter Holiday season.

The Blue Unit train was increased by five cars, three coaches, one flat car and one tunnel car. The show traveled on a total of twenty-five cars. Another order was placed with American Car and Foundry Car Company for six more 89'-4" long piggy back flat cars. One of the new flat cars was built in December 1969 for the Blue Unit.

The other five cars were built in January 1970 for the Red Unit. This give each unit five flat cars in their consists. The Blue Unit car ACF-5 and given the number 124. The number on the tunnel car was changed to 125. The second tunnel car came from one of the tunnel cars surplus on the Red Unit when the new ACF flat cars were delivered. The Red Unit tunnel car was Ex-RI 758 and was #29, its number was changed to a Blue Unit number, 126. The three

coaches added were Ex-RI 865 built to Plan 4122-22 roomette sleeping car. It was originally built for the New York Central as Jamaica Bay, as one of a forty-five car lot. It was sold to the Rock Island which converted it to a baggage car. It was then acquired by Ringling-Barnum in 1968 along with three other baggage cars, RI 864, RI 866 and RI 867. Only RI 865 was used at this time, one set of baggage doors were closed, windows were cut into one end and a dormitory of 21 beds, two high, were installed for concession workers. The balance of the car was used for concession storage. It was placed on the head end of the coaches and numbered 140. This additional car changed the numbers of the next three cars, 141 became 140; 142 became 141; and 143 became 142. Another new car acquired from the Southern Pacific Railroad, was SP 9207, Plan 4072E. It was one of ten cars built as 5 stateroom, 10 roomette sleeping cars. It became Ringling-Barnum 144; 143 became 145; 144 Pie Car and Office became 146; 145 generator dorm became 147; 147 became 148; 146 became 149; 148 became 150. Another new car was also acquired from the Southern Pacific as SP 9100, Plan 4069H, one of eight cars built as 4 bedrooms, 4 compartments, 2 drawing rooms sleeping cars. It became Ringling-Barnum 151; 149 became 152 and 150 private car became 153.

The color scheme used on the new Blue Unit train in 1969 was silver cars with red lettering outlined in yellow. The 1970 Blue Unit train used the same color scheme as 1969. The color of the train in 1971 was changed to white, the lettering salvaged by adding a light blue banner behind the red lettering with yellow outlining. The complete Blue Unit



train was hand lettered so to save the cost of re-lettering the whole train when the color was changed to white, the light blue banners were added. The Red Unit train remained silver with the title in large white letters on a banner that was half blue and half red. Decals were not used on the Ringling-Barnum trains until the Red Unit received its new train in 1973.

The 1971 Train

The Blue Unit train was increased in size for the third season. Another five cars were added, bringing the total number of cars on the train to 30. Four of the five added cars were coaches from the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. They were from a very large group of sleeping cars built to Plan 4167 that had 6 staterooms and 10 roomettes each. Ringling-Barnum acquired four cars, B&O 7042 Guyandoue as RB 155; Kokosing as 7043 RB 150; 7046 Shenango as RB

The all white train of the 1971 new Blue Unit. Gene Baxter photo.

156 and 7047 Tuscarawas as RB 153. The fifth added was a tunnel car that had been built from one of the five New York Central chair cars acquired by Ringling-Barnum in 1965 and was surplus from the Red Unit when the flat cars were added to that unit. It was numbered 127.

The addition of four more coaches increased the electrical power needed for the coaches. A second generator car was required. Ringling-Barnum car 145 (ex-RI 822) had the same configuration as the first generator car ex-RI 823. The staterooms were removed from what was the baggage area. Two diesel powered generators were installed, sides opened and mesh steel panels added similar to the first generator car. The number and placement in the coach

consist was changed from 145 to 152. There were now eighteen coaches.

The electrical system used on the Ringling-Barnum trains was 209 volt, three phase power. The coaches were split into two cuts electrically. The generator car was placed near the middle of each nine car cut. There was a voltage drop the farther you get away from the generators.

1972 Train

The Blue Unit finished its two year tour of the 100th Anniversary Edition. A new edition had all new production numbers, which included opening, aerial ballet, spec, manage, elephants and finale.

There was only one new coach added to the train, another Baltimore & Ohio car. It was the youngest coach in the Blue Unit train, built in 1954 by The Budd Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Budd cars were constructed from stainless steel, with fluted siding

and roofs. Budd had developed the technique of assembling the cars in building jigs, then joining the completed components together to form a unibody. These cars were very strong and durable. The car Ringling-Barnum acquired was B&O 7103 Kingfisher, known as a duplex sleeper. It had 5 staterooms in the center of the car and 5 roomettes at either end. Because the car was completely made of stainless steel it was not painted. It was placed between 140 and 141 and RI 865 140 became 139 and the new car was 140. No other changes were made to the coaches.

Lloyd Morgan, Sr. built a new type of car for the circus. It was similar to the railroad's bi-level automobile carrying cars. He took a 89'4" long flat car and had a custom upper deck built. The lower deck would carry the tiger cages and had sliding panels along the sides to access the cages for watering as well as ventilation. The panels could be left completely open or closed, with several positions in-between. The top deck was accessed by its own set of ramps and loaded the show's staff automobiles. The car was called the "bi-level" and was given Ringling-Barnum number 126. Tunnel car 126 was taken off the train.

The 1973 Train

The train remained on 30 cars, however Lloyd Morgan, Sr. retired and his son Lloyd junior took over as General Manager. Lloyd, Sr's private car Hickory Creek (NYC 10633) Ringling-Barnum 157 was removed from the train and another Baltimore & Ohio sleeper was added. It was B&O 7044 Muscatatuck Plan 4167, 6 staterooms, 10 roomettes, it became Ringling-Barnum 158.

The 1974 Train

Another new Edition with new production numbers debuted in the Venice, Florida winter quarters on December 25, 1973. The new edition was slightly larger. Four additional cars were used, one coach, one stock car and two flat cars.



The Bicentennial Edition lettering on the 1975-1976 Red Unit. Author's photo.

The second all-stainless steel Budd duplex sleeper, a sister car to Baltimore & Ohio 7103, was added. The new car was B&O 7104 Mockingbird, 5 staterooms, 10 roomettes and would be Ringling-Barnum. 141. The train was completely repainted, its color would remain white but the lettering was silk screened onto plastic banners. The banner was dark blue with red lettering and white outlines. The flat cars were still hand lettered. Some of the coaches were repositioned and had number changes.

The two new flat cars were not added until New York City. They were 85'-0" long channel side piggy back flats, Ringling-Barnum 119 was ex-MCLX 8900 and Ringling-Barnum 125 was ex-MCLX 8902. The equipment cars would be split into two cuts. The two new flat cars were placed with the tunnel and bi-level. The second cut was the five ACF flat cars. The cut with the two flats, tunnel and bi-level were known around the show as the "bastard cut," because of the two 85' long flats not being the same length or style as the 89'-4" long flats.

Jeanette Williams and Elvin Bale were married in 1973 and traveled with the Red Unit. He was the

featured performer of the aerial ballet production number and she worked the 14 stallion liberty horse act. They left the Red Unit in mid-production (1973-1974) to join the new edition of the Blue Unit.

The addition of the 14 stallions to the Blue Unit caused over crowding in the horse cars. After the Blue Unit's run in New York City's Madison Square Garden the show moved to Philadelphia. There a new stock car was added. It was ex-Union Pacific baggage car 6315. It was set up to carry the 14 stallions and the balance of the car was used for concession storage.

The list of number changes and contents of the coaches was provided by Frank Perry, Assistant General Manager and recorded by the author on July 20th, 1974.

1973 #s - 1974 #s

Car number changes that were Occupied by:

158 158 half car staterooms, full width, Gautier's; drawingroom, Johnson's; drawingroom, Samel's; single stateroom, Sarnel's groom; single stateroom, Gautier's children. (157 Private Car, removed from consist 1974)

156 156 whole car, Lloyd Morgan, Jr. General Manager and family

155 155 half car, Charley Baumann and wife; half car, Tito Gaona

Blue Unit car 151 on fire at the end of the 1974 season. Author's photo.





The author standing next to car 149 at the end of the 1975 season. Author's photo.

154 154 half car, Frank Perry asst, general manager; three staterooms

152 153 generators, dormitory, Bulgarian and Polish working men

145 152 pie car and show office

150 151 staterooms, roomettes, working men, department bosses and assistants

153 150 staterooms, roomettes, clowns and show girls

148 149 staterooms, time keeper, ring bosses, bus driver, department bosses

146 147 staterooms, Polish performers

149 146 staterooms, show girls (two girls to a room)

144 145 generators, dormitory, Polish working men

142 144 staterooms, Bulgarian performers

141 143 staterooms, Bulgarian performers

143 142 staterooms, Bulgarian performers new
141 staterooms, roomettes, clowns and the King Charles troupe

151 140 staterooms, concession department workers

140 139 staterooms, concession department workers

139 138 concession girls
1/3, concession stock 1/3, machine shop 1/3

The Blue Unit closed the 1974 season in Nassau, Long Island, New York. During the run to winter quarters in Venice, Florida, a fire broke out in 151 car just before dawn

the second day of the trip. As the train was traveling through South Carolina, just about everyone was asleep, so the fire had got a good start before it was discovered. By the time the train could be stopped it was near a small rural town. The car was completely engulfed in flames.

By the time the volunteer fire department arrived, the railroad crew had cut the burning car out from the rest of the coaches. The responding firemen put out the fire. Four circus employees lost their lives in that terrible fire. The car was returned to winter quarters and a replacement car was started. Another Baltimore & Ohio #7040, Auglaise, was a 5 stateroom, 10 roomettes car, replaced the burned out car as the new Ringling-Barnum 151 car.

1975 Season, I Joined The Circus

As a result of the fire, several positions were left vacant by those who died in the fire.

I had spent a considerable amount of time around the show in previous

Robert S. MacDougall, general manager of the Ringling-Barnum Blue Unit.

years. My wife and I took our vacation in Florida in December 1973 and January 1974. We saw the new edition put together and open in Venice, then move to St. Petersburg for the taping of the 1974 T. V. special. I knew most of the people with the show and took a lot of kidding about spending so much time around the show, I should just come to work with it.

I received a phone call in November 1974 offering me a job with the show, filling one of the vacant positions. I decided to give up my position as a senior design engineer with a Borg Warner company I had worked for the last nineteen years and "Ran away with the Circus!"

I joined the show in Venice, Florida winter quarters in December of 1974, accepting the job of wardrobe department boss. I was to receive \$200 per week, 52 weeks per year and no cut in pay for winter quarters. Customarily all working people got half pay in winter quarters and performers received a small rehearsal pay, once the show started performing to the public everyone went back to full pay. There was a week's hold back pay and after the second payday I received my first pay check.

When I opened my pay envelope I discovered they were only paying me \$175. Workingmen were getting \$94.80 per week. I went to the general manager to complain that my deal was not being honored. His remarks

were "If you don't like the pay, don't let the door hit you in the ass as you leave."

I had purchased a one way ticket to Florida and quit my job of nineteen years. Not much choice, I stuck it out, realizing circus life was not an easy one.

I was picked up at the Tampa, Florida airport by the assistant general manager and taken to Venice winter quarters. Because of the time change between California and Florida, I arrived



at a very early hour. I was dropped off at winter quarters and told my bags would be put on the train. I was expected to go right to work and work the full day. The crew of workingmen I acquired had only one man who had been on the show the previous season and spoke English. The rest of my crew were all Polish workingmen who had just arrived from Poland. Most of them could not speak English and I spoke no Polish.

I encountered every problem in the book, from broken sewing machines to missing props. No one had any idea what they were supposed to do, including me! After a day of work that I thought would never end, rehearsals were over for the day but there was still problems to be dealt with. I walked back to the train which was just across the inter-coastal water way, it was dark already and I had to pick my way through the dark. Finding the train I asked someone where car 149 was located. They gave me directions and I found 149 car and my room with the key in the door and my bags laying on the floor.

The room was a single stateroom and measured 6 feet wide and 7 1/2 feet deep. There was a single upper bunk that ran the length of the car. Under the bunk was a home built bench seat and small table next to the single window. On one wall there was a small stainless steel sink and an under-counter refrigerator. The entrance to the room was only as wide as the door because the clos-

The Hickory Creek car in Portland, Maine in 1977. Author's photo.



The polar bear cages about to enter the Boston Garden. Author's photo.

ets from the staterooms on either side extended into my room, making the room kind of "Tee" shaped. I surveyed the room and decided I would do some cleaning before I turned in. I walked to the nearest store which was getting ready to close, bought some cleaning supplies and a bit of food. I had not eaten anything since I left California. I returned to my room, cleaned it from top to bottom, made myself a bite to eat and climbed into my bunk. I awoke to someone pounding on my door telling me it was time to go to work. It was 7 AM, and the reality of what I had done was starting to sink in. I was in a state of cultural shock!

Somehow we made it through rehearsals with the show's director, Richard Barstow, yelling his head off for wardrobe men to set the props for the next production numbers run through. The show opened and everyone's spirits were better because they were getting full pay again. The first town was Lakeland, Florida.

Part of the wardrobe department's duties was to set the runs on the tunnel car and bi-level when we arrived in town. After the runs were set we rode the show's bus to the lot. There we had the task of setting up the wild animal act tents, I was introduced to a 16 pound sledge hammer and a lot of stakes to drive. I had seen a lot of

circus tents of all sizes set up before but had never taken part in setting any of them up. I had to layout both tents, help drive the stakes and help the crew set up the two tents.

I was lucky that one of my Polish workingmen had traveled with a Polish tent circus and really knew tents. I have endless stories about the circus but we need to get back to the history of the coaches, train and equipment of the Blue Unit.

Oh, I forgot to mention that while I was cleaning my room that first night, I came across a small card with this message written on it, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life, make it count." I have never forgotten that card or the message it had.

1975-1976

The country's Bi-Centennial Celebration. The circus made the 1975 Red Unit its special Bicentennial Edition which ran through 1976. The Blue Unit used the theme, 200 Years Of The Circus and The Wedding Of Michu, The World's Smallest Man. The Blue Edition ran in 1976 and 1977.

The 1975-1976 Red Unit received red, white and blue new train decals. A special smaller banner was applied that said "Special Bi-Centennial Edition." The cars were decorated with red spheres with a snarling tiger head. Several of these were applied to each car wherever there was space. The standard Greatest Show On Earth globe was applied to either end of the car. One globe had a red background and the other had a blue background. The car numbers were red.

The Blue Unit's train remained white but the same decals, except the small banner saying Special Bi-Centennial Edition was omitted. The car numbers were blue.

A ten polar bear cage act was imported from East Germany. It featured animals that weighed 1,000 to 1,500 pounds each. The act required

special needs and a new set of twelve cages were built. My engineering skills were requested in the design of the new cages. They were similar to the tiger cages but were longer, wider, and taller. The new polar bear cages were fabricated by G & G Metals Company in Venice, Florida. The new cages would not fit inside the lower deck of the bi-level flat car so a new tunnel car was rebuilt from a tunnel car used last on the 1971 Blue Unit. The car was ex-RI 758 and it had cut-out sliding panels on each side similar to the bi-level car which allowed access to the cages for watering. Additionally, large water tanks were installed under the car. The tunnel car became RB 128.

The private car Hickory Creek was slightly remodeled for Lloyd Morgan, Jr. and his family. It was added to the consist as RB 157.

Assistant general manager, Frank Perry, moved into Lloyd's space in RB 156. The first cars were removed from the unit for possible recycling. Three newly acquired New York Central sleepers from the "Port" series were NYC 10502 Port of Albany; NYC 10503 Port of Boston and NYC 10511 Port of Detroit, all 12 bedroom cars built to Plan 4125. These three cars had been purchased by Judge Hofheinz in 1968. It is assumed that Hofheinz had them stored somewhere in Texas until they were transferred to the RB&BB winter quarters in 1977. The County cars had 13 bedrooms, NYC 10534, NYC 10536 and NYC 10537 were replaced by the new "Port" car.

Changes

Ringling-Barnum 142 NYC 10536 was replaced by NYC 10502.

Ringling-Barnum. 143 NYC 10534 was replaced by NYC 10503.

Ringling-Barnum 144 NYC 10537 was replaced by NYC 10511

Three Union Pacific baggage cars were sent to New York City to replace the old Rock Island stock cars. UP 6300, UP 6318 and UP 6312 joined Ringling-Barnum 134 UP 6315 which was already on the show. The number was changed to RB 133. Rock Island 756 (RB 133) was gutted while in

New York City then sent back to Florida with the other three Rock Island stock cars. The gutted car was rebuilt into a concession storage car and included an ice making machine to supply snocone ice to the concession department. When the car was completed it returned to the Blue Unit in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



The new laundry car after the fire in Los Angeles. Author's photo.

The new Union Pacific stock cars did not have sleeping accommodations for the animal men, instead a New York Central chair car that was surplus by the Red Unit in 1973 was taken out of storage and remodeled into a sleeper for the animal men. The car had two staterooms for the animal department's assistant bosses. The bunks that filled the balance of the car were three high beds. When the new car was delivered to New York City along with the new Union Pacific stock cars the teamsters union, which all Ringling-Barnum working personnel had to belong to, rejected the new car, claiming there had not been any three high bunks since the days when the show was still under canvas. Further, they had two high bunks in the old stock cars and voted to reject the new car unless it was rebuilt into two high bunks. The car was sent back to Florida and reworked. The car rejoined in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The new animal men's sleeper was placed between the elephant cars and the horse cars and numbered RB 134.

The 1977 Train

The color of the Blue Unit train was changed from white to silver.

The same decals from 1976 were retained. The recycling of railroad cars was started during the winter of 1976-1977. The New York Central "Port" series cars 10534, 10536 and 10537 were considered for recycling. It was pointed out that these cars were built in 1940 and were nearing the 50 year life expectancy.

There were two cars being considered for replacement, RB 147, housing Polish performers and RB 148, housing Hungarian performers. Cars NYC 10534 and NYC 10537 were selected, the center stateroom was removed and two toilet rooms installed. The toilet was removed from the end of the car and the water system was moved from outside, under the car, to inside the car.

Frozen water systems in winter were a problem. The roofs of the cars were sandblasted to remove the tar type coating and the vestibule steps were rebuilt, removing the retractable system. The number of coaches remained the same for 1977. Cars recycled: NYC 10508 was replaced by new RB 147 NYC 10534; and NYC 10501 was replaced by new RB 148 NYC 10537. Near the end of the 1977 season, in Detroit. Lloyd Morgan, Jr. was removed as general manager of the Blue Unit. Baker Brown took over and was now general manager of both the Red and Blue Units. In 1978 there was talk of another new show.

The Felds had been a large part of the Monte Carlo Circus Festival staged in Monte Carlo around the holidays each year. The Felds produced a one hour TV special of the Festival and the awards ceremony.

After ten years of producing the TV special of the Monte Carlo Festival, the Felds believed the reception by the American public of this Festival and its winners had generated enough interest in the USA to establish a new show made up of all Monte Carlo award winners. The natural choice for the new show's title was "Cirque Monte Carlo Spectacular." Prince Ranier of Monaco was host of the yearly Festival. There would be

strong ties between the Prince and the new show.

It was a one ring European style show on a fifteen car train similar to the Red and Blue Unit's train.

1978, A Very Busy Year

Baker Brown was selected to be the new unit's General Manager. He and others on staff put the show together in winter quarters. Being a full time responsibility, it was felt a separate general manager was needed for unit. Dean McMurray had been acting general manager of the Red Unit and Baker Brown had been guiding the Blue Unit.

Several new staff members were added to the Blue Unit and a search for a new manager was on!

The rail car recycling operation in Venice, Florida was becoming more ambitious. A group of five cars became shop cars. They were: (A) # 25 (US GOVT.), steel working; (B) # 135 (NYC 10436, air brake and running gear; (C) #754 (RI 754), tool storage; (D) #759 (RI 759) carpenter and wood working and (E) #2069 (NYNH&H 518), electrical and plumbing.

John Bridges and Charlie Smith were in charge of train recycling. Niel Simpson was director of transportation and in charge of winter quarters. Simpson did the surveying of any new cars considered for acquisition. William Hutchins was safety engineer.

Following my involvement in the design of the polar bear cages for the 1976 season, I was asked to apply my engineering skills to mechanical problems the circus had. Bill Hutchins was hired to lend his expertise to the safety of the trains. The 1974 train fire that occurred on the home run to winter quarters was cause for the company to take a closer look at safety on their trains.

Two-way Motorola hand held radios were put into service on both units. A new set of train rules was developed for personnel riding the trains, and Bill Hutchins set up regular inspections of the unit trains, including inspecting the running gear of all company owned railroad cars and all cars that housed people were inspected for good house keeping practices. Reports were submit-

ted to the home office and general managers of each unit. Deficiencies had to be corrected as soon as possible by the unit's train and porter crews.

The constant enlarging of the trains created several areas of concern. Constant use of the cars on an eleven month tour and the fact that people lived on the cars year round caused plenty of wear and tear on the interiors. This heavy use combined with the general condition and age of all cars created the need to replace or recycle cars on a regular schedule. Simpson, Hutchins and myself were involved in planning car replacements for the unit's trains. Hutchins and I made drawings to satisfy individual needs and Simpson had the task of finding good used cars to support our efforts.

Work started on NYC 10501 for a replacement car for RB 149 NYC 10500. The decision to recycle these old coaches was a mistake, but budget restraints and car availability supported the decision. The show should have been looking at acquiring younger cars for recycling. NYC 10501 was the first recycled car that was completely gutted and rebuilt using house type construction similar to what had been used to build the Red Unit cars. There was some concern about removing the interiors of sleeping cars for fear of harming the integrity of the car body. Previous cars started as chair cars which had a minimum of interior walls.

The new car's construction was taken beyond just painted plywood walls and cabinets. Wood grain plywood paneling was used throughout the car. When finished it was admired as one of the best appointed cars on the show. A deluxe double stateroom with full bathroom, including a tub and shower was in the center of the car. The balance of the car had single staterooms. It had a single donnicker in the blind end of the car. The vestibule was rebuilt, removing the retractable steps. Lighted exit lights equipped with emergency lights were installed at each end of the car.

The old car, that was replaced by the new 149 car,

was gutted and made into another concession storage car. All the windows were closed and side loading doors cut in. A controversial laundry room was installed in one end. It was argued that commercial laundry equipment would not operate correctly in this environment. This proved to be correct. The vibration of the equipment trying to run in a car setting on sprung trucks was a major problem. The car was delivered to the unit on the west coast. Attempts by the unit's train crew to beef up the floor of the laundry room accidentally set the car on fire. By the time local firefighters extinguished the blaze, the car's interior and contents was a complete loss. Local carpenters were hired to rebuild the interior for concession storage only. The laundry was a failure.

When Baker Brown took over as general manager of both units he had the Hickory Creek remodeled as his private car. He traveled with the Blue Unit but worked between both units. The announcement was made that a new show would be built. Brown would be in charge of building the complete show and be its general manager.

I was promoted to Assistant General Manager of the Blue Unit in July on the west coast at Los Angeles, California and moved into a half car in Shenango, ex-B&O 7046.

Niel Simpson, Director of Transportation, started purchasing railroad cars for the new show. A car acquired from Amtrak 2805, Ex-B&O 7050 was gutted and rebuilt along

John Roushe and Bob MacDougall in front of a Monte Carlo sleeper. Author's photo.



with the new Monte Carlo Unit coaches. This car and all the new show's cars were built in Palmetto, Florida. RB 143, ex-NYC 10502 was replaced by the new car, Amtrak 2805.

At the end of the 1978 season, three general managers were announced. Robert S. MacDougall would be General Manager of the Blue Unit,



Digging out of the 20 inch snow in Norfolk, Virginia in 1980. Author's photo.

Dean McMurray would be the General Manager of the Red Unit and Baker Brown would be the General Manager of the Monte Carlo Unit. New cars were being built for both Unit General Managers. Ex-Amtrak 2218 Indian Scout was started through recycling to become a private car. The Indian Scout had been a Santa Fe Railroad, AT&SF 910, 11 bedroom sleeper. The Santa Fe "Indian" series cars were rebuilt by the Santa Fe in 1962. The cars went into Amtrak service in 1972.

Cirque Monte Carlo Spectacular

The search for railroad cars was started by Niel Simpson, Vice President of Transportation. He and Baker Brown started lining up cars to be surveyed and offers to purchase same. A search for fifteen additional railroad cars was no small order! Word went out to the major railroads as well as Amtrak for available cars. There were still plenty of good serviceable passenger cars setting idle in surplus inventories.

It was decided to look for cars requiring the least amount of work to convert them for circus use. Sleepers

were sought for personnel cars, baggage cars were needed for animal and concession cars and flat cars were needed to carry the equipment.

The use of ocean going containers seemed to fill the need as wagons. Twenty foot containers were purchased and converted into equipment wagons. New cages were built for Karoly Donnert's tigers, a school bus and Clark tow tractors filled out the roster.

Cars came from major lines such as the L&N, RF&P, SCL, UP, WP, C&O, Southern, Amtrak and the bankrupt Auto-Train.

Equipment cars were purchased from NIFX and were auto carrying bi-level cars. Three had the auto racks removed and the fourth was used as it was except sides were added to the lower deck which would carry the cat cages.

A three axle 85 foot Union Pacific baggage car was the only animal car and a Western Pacific 75 foot baggage car, which came from the "California Zepher," was the concession storage car. Five sleepers came from Auto-Train, and a chair car from the Southern Railroad's "Crescent Limited" became the combination generator car and pie car. One Amtrak sleeper and one ex-Blue Unit sleeper rounded out the coaches. All work on the new cars was done in the rail yards behind the Palmetto Police Station. This yard served the tomato growers in the Palmetto area. The main car recycling and rebuilding operation was centered in Venice.

1979 Monte Carlo Unit Train

230 UP 6300 baggage car, animals, elephant and horses

231 WP 801 Silver Beaver, baggage car, concession storage

240 C&O 2618 Volusa County, sleeper (ex-AMTK 2805)

241 NYC 10536 La Porte County, sleeper (ex-recycled Blue)

242 L&N 3468 Whispering Pine, sleeper (ex-AUT 612)

243 SCL 6406 Pinehurst, sleeper (ex-AUT 606)

244 SOU 3312, chair car, Pie Car, Office, Generator

245 RF&P 408 King William, sleeper (ex-AUT 632)

246 L&N 3453 Green Pine, sleeper (ex-AUT 610),

247 L&N 3464 Short Leaf Pine, sleeper (ex-AUT 611)

248 RF&P 409 King & Queen, sleeper (ex-AUT 633),

249 SCL 6404 Cedartown, sleeper (ex-AUT 604),

Flat Cars

220 NIFX 2089, run car

221 NIFX 8294,

222 NIFX 13121,

223 NIFX 4025 Bi-Level.

All flatcars had sliding center sill cushioning devices.

Only the railroad equipment is listed above. Details of the show will be given in a very condensed form. The show opened in Providence, Rhode Island and played twenty-six cities. It closed in Macon, Georgia and was sent back to winter quarters in Venice, Florida. Shortly after, it was decided to reopen under a tent at Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's theme park in Haines City, Florida. The fifteen car train was taken to Davenport, Florida, the closest railroad location, to Haines City. The Monte Carlo finished the balance of 1979 at the park. The train was returned to winter quarters in Venice, Florida and became surplus. It was further decided to take the Monte Carlo Unit on a tour of Australia and Japan in 1980. The fifteen car train remained in winter quarters. At the end of the 1980 tour, the Monte Carlo unit was disbanded, the title shelved and the fifteen car train declared surplus.

Some interesting facts about transportation costs for moving the fifteen car Monte Carlo train. The cost of railroad transportation for 26 cities, traveling 9,575 miles cost \$259,129. The move from Macon, Georgia to Venice, Florida was 623 miles and cost \$15,752 and the move from Venice, Florida to Davenport, Florida cost \$4,681. It is assumed the move from Davenport back to Venice winter quarters was an additional \$4,681, bringing the total cost of

transporting the Monte Carlo fifteen car train in 1979 to \$284,243.

At the conclusion of the first ten years of Blue Unit operation, some of the original coaches were starting to show signs of wear and tear. Most all the coaches were occupied year round and a lot of the rooms had been lived in by many people.

The circus people were allowed quite a bit of freedom in personal decorations in an attempt to make their very small quarters as homey as possible. The years of decorating by painting, applying different wall coverings and colors of paint plus using screws and nails for wall hangings took their toll on most interiors. Cars usually were worn out inside while the car body itself had comparatively little mileage. The railroads put hundreds of thousand miles on their passenger equipment, while the circus only put a small fraction of that mileage on them.

The Blue Unit began in 1969 with twenty railroad cars total. By 1979 the train had grown to forty cars. Originally there were eleven coaches and by the end of the 1979 season there were twenty-four coaches. Personal space was greatly increased. The condition of several of the Blue Unit railroad cars was poor. Criteria used for car replacements was generally condition and age, determined from the building date of each car. A decision to replace older coaches on the Blue Unit with the Monte Carlo coaches was made.

1980 Blue Unit

The replacement cars were used starting with the 1980 season. They were, MC242 an added car; MC243 replaced 136; MC244 replaced 152 and 141; MC245 replaced 153; MC246 replaced 143; MC247 replaced 156 and AT&SF 910 Indian Scout replaced 157. A fifth stock car was added, MC230, to carry the Richter Family animals, two elephants and several heavy horses used in the riding act.

There were 25 coaches in the Blue Unit consist for both 1980 and 1981 seasons. The coach numbers were



Some of the eleven cars derailed in Gibson City, Illinois in 1981. Author's photo.

changed from three digit to two digit numbers. A list of those number changes follows: (1980/1981) 134/75; 135/76; 136M/77; 137/78; 138/79; 139/80; 141 & 152/81; 151/82; 150/83; 149/84; 148/85; new/86; 147/87; 146/88; 145/89; 144/90; new /91; 143/92; new/93; 153/94; 154/95; new/96; 155/97; 156/98; 157/99 and 158/100. Stock car 230/134.

Record 20 inch snow fall strands circus

It started out as a normal engagement in Norfolk, Virginia with fair but cold weather which is not unusual for early spring. By the weekend the weather turned nasty and a winter storm was headed in from Chesapeake Bay. We awoke to falling snow Saturday morning but no one thought much of it and we started for the building for a typical three show Saturday, March 1, 1980.

The snow continued, heavy at times, all day Saturday. The city of Norfolk was more concerned about this storm than we were on the circus because snow storms in early spring were not unusual. It continued to snow all of Saturday night and was still snowing Sunday morning.

The train was stored in a Norfolk & Western coal loading dock yard on the edge of Chesapeake Bay. Our location was three miles into railroad property, deep inside the coal yards. Going back to the train Saturday night was kind of fun as snow was starting to accumulate. Everyone was tired from a three show day, but a few found time for a good old fashioned snow ball fight when the bus

arrived back at the train.

Neither the railroad nor the city of Norfolk had snow fighting equipment such as snow plows and the like. It was very unusual for the city to have this kind of snowfall. Sunday proved to be a little difficult to get the three miles through the railroad yard and through the city streets. Nothing had been plowed but traffic was keeping the snow compacted on the streets.

By the time we arrived at the building we were informed that the city of Norfolk had declared a state of emergency and people were being advised to stay home and off the streets. Snow was still falling. The building management asked if we were going to give our scheduled performances on Sunday. I told them as long as tickets had been sold and people showed up to go to the performances, we would put on our show to any ticket holders who came to the building. We gave the first performance of the day to a rather light house.

It continued to snow and warnings became more forceful. People were ordered to stay off the streets. Customers were arriving for the 5:30 p.m. performance, entering the parking garage and out of the snow. I gave the order to open the box office and doors and let anyone with tickets in, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus would go on as usual.

The late afternoon house was lighter than the first show, but people came to see the Greatest Show on Earth and I was not about to disappoint them. It continued snowing! While the performance was in progress the city officials and the building management declared an emergency and decided not to let any one to leave the building after the show. Since it was our last performance in Norfolk and since every thing was enclosed inside the building we did not need to go outside for any thing. We proceeded to tear down and load the equipment which I would leave inside the building over night and see how things looked in the morning. The city and Red Cross

brought in cots, blankets and made food available. They went about getting everyone who was at the circus comfortable for an overnight stay. We were told the storm would stop by morning and people could go home.

The circus people were gathered at the bus by the back door, inside the building. The building security refused to open the rollup doors to let us out. I drove my auto to the door and got out to press the button that operated the doors and no one stopped us. I led the bus and other vehicles back to the train. Getting over the streets and traversing the three miles into the railroad yard was a little rough, as the snow was drifting and accumulating at a good rate.

Monday morning, March 3, we awoke to bright sun light. The storm was over! Twenty inches of snow had fallen on the city of Norfolk, Virginia. I had everyone up by six a.m. and asked for volunteers to shovel the snow off the flat cars and the loading ramps. We drove our heaviest trucks to the building where I set up a schedule to transport the equipment to the train for loading.

We felt the temperature would be at its highest around noon and that was when we scheduled the animal walk back to the train. We got national TV coverage of the elephants walking out of the building and into the snow covered streets.

Getting all the equipment back to the train was a hazardous task. Streets were lined with cars that had been abandoned where they got stuck and people found other ways of getting home. The streets were an obstacle course of stalled and stuck vehicles. Once we reached the railroad yards there were no vehicles in our way, but it was three miles into the yard through heavy snow drifts to get to the flats. It took all day to get the train loaded and it was getting dark when the last of the train was loaded.

The railroad was moving, but at a snail's pace, however. We got the train made up and pulled out of the coal yards by early evening. Our next stand on March 4-9 was Richmond, Virginia, which was an easy 103 mile overnight move. We

arrived mid morning, March 4 to the same snow storm that had left Richmond in a blanket of snow covered by sheer ice! It had turned to rain near the end of the storm and left a frozen coat of ice on everything. We spotted the train in the railroad yards and set the runs to unload. The first pieces of equipment off the train ran into pot holes that were in the rail yard filled with snow and ice.

The normal route to the building from the train was up a very long steep hill! I asked the police if there was an easier way to the building with less hills. They lead us out on to the main street in town which had a lesser hill but had enough traffic over it to break up the ice and snow, with sun being out brightly the stuff was turning to slush pretty fast.

All the equipment and animals were taken to the building and setup started a little later than usual, but would be ready by show time. It was a close call but we opened on time. By the end of the week the snow was all but gone but the weather had turned very cold. This caused some of the water lines on the cars to freeze. Some lines burst and a lot of cars were without water. Some performers requested to be put in hotels but I declared the cars livable. They would have to carry a little water but the generators were running and the cars all had heat. The rest of the engagement went smoothly and slowly things got back to normal.

Blue Unit Train Wreck 1981

The trip west from Indianapolis, Indiana to Des Moines, Iowa involved using three different railroads. We

Another view of the Gibson City derailment. Author's photo.



departed Indianapolis on ConRail, proceeded Northwest to Lafayette, Indiana where an interchange was made to the Norfolk & Western Railroad (N&W). We traveled west again to Danville, Illinois then north to Hoopeston, turning west toward Bloomington, Illinois, interchanging again to Burlington Northern Railroad (BN) at Peoria, Illinois and crossing into Iowa at Burlington then on to Des Moines, Iowa.

Approximately 35 miles east of Bloomington, Illinois between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. I was awakened by what felt like we were riding on the wood ties instead of the rail. The train came to a violent stop! I went to my vestibule door and looked forward. About half way up the train I could see our circus cars derailed in a zigzag pattern. I knew immediately we were in a wreck.

I got dressed and started forward, arriving at the first derailed cars. People were starting to come out of their cars. I asked if anyone was hurt? They said no but I could see it got worse the closer to the front end of train I got. As I came to a point where there was another railroad track crossing the track we were on, diagonally, I started to see heavily damaged cars. They lay in a zigzag pattern, with cars off the rails, leaning over about 45 degrees, almost on their sides. Rail ties and dirt was piled every where. I went to each car asking if any one was injured? Not that any one could tell, so far. The pie car and the forward generator cars were involved in the wreck.

This was part of the train where living quarters were more densely occupied. No injuries were reported as more and more circus people came out of the train. I tried to survey the extent of the damage when several railroad men arrived and asked if there was anyone hurt. I said, not that I knew of at this point.

There was a railroad interlocking tower located at this junction where the two tracks crossed. I asked if there was a phone in that tower? Yes! I asked if I could use it? They said help yourself. I alerted our Washington, D.C. office there had been a major train derailment in Gibson City,

Illinois about 100 miles South of Chicago.

From the second floor of the railroad tower I got a better look at the wreck, I counted what looked like eleven cars on the ground, three seriously close to turning over on their sides. I returned to ground level and went to each car, telling every one to get out of the cars and away from the train.

There were no serious injuries other than everyone being bounced around and shook up pretty bad. No one had to be taken to the hospital. By then there were lots of locals and railroad people gathering. Police and fire rescue units had responded to the news of the wreck.

A survey of the eleven derailed cars was made. The pie car and generators were out of business. After we realized the cars were stable, I instructed the pie car manager to remove all the food and give it to anyone who wanted it. It would surely spoil. We were not going anywhere soon!

I got a head count of how many people were displaced in the wrecked cars. I asked the railroad people if there was a way around the wrecked cars? They weren't sure. I walked forward to the head end of the train and found the engines and the first eight circus cars were still on the rails. These eight cars included the animal cars. All the animals were safe and unhurt.

My quick survey and investigation, revealed a large piece of steel laying beside the track that had fallen off the engine's truck where one of the break shoes was connected. A check of the lead engine confirmed it was

missing. A bracket that was supposed to catch this piece if it were to break was missing also. I surmised what that this large piece of steel was dragged along before it completely broke off and had been pulled through a set of switch points, spreading the rail and loosening the spikes holding the rails in gauge, spreading enough to allow the ninth car over this point to go down between the rails, derailing the next ten cars.

Approximately one hundred feet back from this switch was the crossing point of the two tracks. These cross overs, at a diagonal, had diamond, which consists of very heavy pieces of rail bolted and welded into the diamond crossing. Being very strong, this caused most of the damage to the circus cars running gear and wheels. A real tangled mess of twisted steel and cars were scattered all over the adjacent area.

I started to organize in my head how we were going to get to the next stand in Des Moines, Iowa. We were about 90 miles east of Des Moines. The railroad advised it would be many hours to get the tracks cleared and that their heavy equipment was en-route to start clearing the track.

I met with the N&W railroad officials and we worked out a plan to get the rear end of the train back together by using some side track that serviced a Cargill grain elevator facility. We found that there was sufficient track to route the rear end of

The Blue Unit flats ready to unload in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1982.
Author's photo.

the train, through these side tracks and coupling them up to the cars on the head end that was still on the rails.

I knew if there was a way to put the cars left on the rails back together, we could proceed to Des Moines.

My staff gave me details of what our situation was. We needed three rental buses to take the people from the wrecked cars on to Des Moines. I called our transportation department in Washington and had them arrange for bus transportation to Des Moines, arrange for hotel space and talk to the N&W railroad about getting the train on to Des Moines.

In less than ten hours we were under way again to Des Moines. We could give a show but it might be a little late! Eleven cars were left behind and the buses and the balance of the train left Gibson City around 6 o'clock in the evening.

Traveling west through Bloomington to Peoria where we interchanged to the Burlington Northern railroad which took us into Des Moines. We arrived Des Moines approximately twelve hours behind schedule.

Back at the wreck, I left my assistant, Mike Fauls, to stay with the cars, watch over personal belongings and coordinate repairs to the circus cars. The damaged cars were rerailed and assembled into what is called a "hospital train." In other words, the cars were headed for the train hospital! The N&W car repair shops were located in Frankfort, Indiana about 70 miles east of the wreck. There the railroad would make repairs on all cars and have them brought on to Des Moines.



A plan was coordinated through our transportation department and the railroad to return the cars to the show as soon as repairs were made and the cars were inspected for service again. Fortunately none of the cars suffered any structural damage and all could be repaired by replacing damaged wheels and under gear. All cars returned to Des Moines by the end of that engagement.

They say there is a circus superstition that things happen in threes! The wreck was one. Johnny Zoppe fell from his aerial rigging during the first show in Des Moines and was hospitalized, that was two. When Mike Fauls tried to bring the diesel generator plants back on line, one engine threw a connecting rod through the side of the engine block, disabling that generator set, that was three!

The transfusion of Monte Carlo coaches and one new private car made the Blue Unit coaches into a much improved fleet of cars. The 1981 recycling budget was drastically cut back, the department man power was cut to three or four men. Bill Hutchins stepped down and John Bridges left the company. Niel Simpson assumed the responsibilities for train recycling. A meeting was held to review recycling needs for 1982.

Plans for a roomette or stateroom car were uncertain. A counter proposal was to use the last Monte Carlo

coach in the Blue Unit train. A plan to take recycling money out of the unit's operating budget was opposed by the General Manager and a decision not to recycle any cars was adopted. A small crew was kept on the payroll to modify the Monte Carlo coach, work starting in late summer. Due to excessive wear and tear on the interior, the two Budd built 1954 Duplex sleepers were removed from the consist and replaced by cars with older build dates but with new interiors. The two Budd cars would be prime candidates for future recycling.

The train recycling budget dispute was resolved

and kept separately from the unit's budgets. New cars were acquired from Amtrak and AutoTrain auctions in December of 1981 and January of 1982. The Amtrak car was built in 1958 and the three AutoTrain cars were built in 1955. These cars were added to the two 1954 Budd Duplex cars, giving the recycling inventory some excellent cars to work with.

I had been submitting five and ten year projections of the Blue Unit's railroad car needs. I submitted drawings for several new ideas for car use and interior designs. Some of my proposals were to sound attenuate the generator cars and I proposed the first "Silent Power" generator cars. I also suggested to remove personnel's living quarters in the generator cars by using the dormitory space for other purposes. My objectives were better living condition, primarily for showgirls, clowns and workingmen. Further, a program was enacted to convert all railroad wheel journal boxes to accept EE type bearings, which would reduce maintenance costs drastically. Further cost reductions could be achieved through a program to convert the train's air brakes to a system known as ABDW type brakes, making the coaches and freight cars' brakes compatible. History shows that most of my proposals were adopted, however it would take another ten to fifteen years to bring them to reality.

1982 Blue Unit

No changes in the coaches or num-

Container of elephants being loaded on ship for Japan. Author's photo.



bers were made in 1982. At the end of the season I was transferred to the Red Unit, taking my private car, Indian Scout with me. Indian Scout AT&SF 901 became Red Unit 59. The Red Unit's private car National Colors N&W-JPC 2 went to the Blue Unit as 99 car. Michael Fauls, Assistant General Manager of the Blue Unit, was promoted to General Manager and moved into the National Colors private car. I continued in my new position and assumed the engineering needs for both units, continuing my five and ten year projections and advising on all train recycling issues.

An ambitious recycling plan was submitted that supported the systematic replacement of cars on both units considering the interior condition and the overall age of the car bodies. As recycling budget money became available, cars continued to be replaced on both units. The Blue Unit story will continue through 1989, completing this twenty year coach history segment.

In 1982 one coach was added to the Blue Unit, Ex-SCL 6404 (Monte Carlo 249) as Blue Unit 75, changing number of old 75 car to new 74 car. A new car Southern 5299 (ex-AMT 5299) replaced 87 car and NYC 10534 car was retired. The stock car 134, ex-UP 6320 was prepared as a generator car to replace 94 car RI 823. There were now twenty-seven coaches on the Blue Unit train.

In 1983 two of the newly acquired AutoTrain cars, AUT 604 (ex-SCL 6404) and AUT 606 (ex-SCL 6406) were recycled and replaced car 75 RI 756 and car 76 RED #54 ex-NYC 29,

respectively. A recycled 85' flat car, ex-Red Unit #22 became Blue Unit flat car #111. Ongoing projects upgrading air brakes and wheel bearings continued.

Railroad Rules

A clarification, is needed regarding the way railroad rules are interpreted and applied to the circus' railroad cars. The railroad's passenger trains were in their declining years. Amtrak, a federally subsidized passenger train network, was estab-

lished in 1971. Passenger equipment was abundant on the used car market, as Amtrak had surveyed and set aside the best cars to equip the trains they operated. Surplus cars were everywhere and very available, for a price. Ringling took the opportunity to improve its passenger car fleet.

The Association of American Railroads (AAR) rule book for interchanging cars between railroads was the guide that established what was referred to as the "40 year rule," which simply stated that cars that had reached the forty year mark from the time they were built were excluded from interchanging from one railroad to another. Further, it set the ultimate life of a car at fifty. These rules of interchange did not apply to cars that were operated within a railroad's own system. Since the circus owned its own railroad cars but used the various railroads tracks and motive power to transport their trains it was obliged to use the rules set down in the interchange rule book. These books were revised each year and rules changed from one year to another.

The Association Of Railroad Private Car Owners adopted the interchange rules and made their cars compatible with Amtrak equipment. Amtrak being the means they used to move their private cars around the railroad systems throughout the USA. A set of guidelines, generally referred to as the 40 year inspection rule, was used to make cars that were older than forty years able to be operated on railroads and Amtrak after the requirements of this inspection were met. The

The first center vestibule car under construction in Venice. Author's photo.



Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus train was privately owned and after going through the recycling program met this same criteria.

During the years before Cruise Train came into being, Ringling and Strates were the only operators of large private trains. Tourist Trains operated on a captured system, and railroads operated their own private cars and company trains. Excursion trains were usually confined to operating within the host railroad's own system.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, one of Ringling's prime concerns was the age of the cars operating within their two units. The acquisition of cars was held to company imposed guidelines, but the condition of a car interior was a bigger factor than its age in determining replacement.

It must be noted that the increase in the number of cars on each unit did not increase the overall size of the show, but instead, to improve the comfort and space given to the people who lived and traveled continually aboard the cars. Standards to which the cars' interiors were built were improved for efficiency and comfort. Water systems were protected against freezing in cold weather. Improved air conditioning and heating systems and the occupants safety was a paramount concern.

Improvements were made in the animal cars by self contained water systems and powered ventilation. Stock cars were also a part of the recycling program, although they are not a featured part of this article, nor are the flat cars or the equipment.

1984

We pick up our year by year study with 1984. When the Blue Unit was created, all the railroad cars were streamlined light weight cars, in other words there were no heavy weight, three axle trucked cars available for the generator car. The two

electric generator sets were installed at one end of the car, directly over a two-axle truck. Truck springs were not compensated for the extra weight. The constant pounding the generator end of the car took, caused problems for both the generator sets and the car itself.

Most of the car's sides were removed to give the engines ventilation, metal sides were replaced with screen mesh panels. As the unit grew in size a second generator car was required. A similar car was used for that purpose.

After ten years of use the original generator car was in poor condition. The newer generator car from the Monte Carlo Unit was selected as a replacement. It also was a two axle car that had even more of the car's sides removed. This was a major engineering mistake, plus it had been combined with the pie car, thinking this was removing anyone living in a generator car. As general manager of the Blue Unit, I objected strongly to taking this car on the Blue Unit. I opposed its design when it was built for the Monte Carlo Unit but was ignored, further, they tried to tell me it would replace two cars, ignoring the fact that the workingmen displaced from the old generator car's dormitories would have to be given space in another car.

Another argument against the car was that it had been designed to serve a unit that was one third the size of the Blue Unit. The pie car was too small to fill the needs of my unit. It seemed to be the lesser of two evils, to keep the old car or take a car that would not fill the requirements of the larger unit. The change was made but just a few years after I had taken over the Red Unit, the car developed structural damage on the generator end and had to be replaced, only now two cars would be needed again. But again, this is jumping ahead of our story.

The second light weight two axle generator car, Blue Unit 94 RI 823 was replaced by a three axle Union Pacific baggage car (UP 6320) which had been left in winter quarters in 1983 to be modified into a generator car. Old 88 car NYC 10537 was replaced by AMT 6061 (ex-UP 5493) and numbered 88.

1985 First Center Vestibule Coach

In 1985 a new sleeper UP 5466 (ex-Red 41) replaced old 97 car SP 9100 and one of the Budd stainless steel duplex sleepers B&O 7103 replaced old 78 car B&O 7044. When the stainless steel Budd car was recycled, it was realized just how tough and durable the Budd stainless cars were. With a completely new interior the car would be serviceable many more years. Niel Simpson's assistant transportation director, Bill Misuria, was starting to take an active role in the company's train recycling department. Bill worked closely with Mike Fauls to develop a new management car that would allow the complete car to have full width compartments by cutting a second vestibule into the center of the car. This was the first center vestibule car in Ringling-Barnum's passenger car fleet.

This car would be followed by two more similar cars in subsequent years. These cars were approved for recycling and were ready for the 1986 season. Management car #95 (RI 820) will be replaced by AMT 4595 (UP 5555 Built. ACF 1964) and had a center vestibule; Storage car #74 (RI 756) was replaced by AMT 4893 (BNP 584 Built. P.S. 1956) and performer's stateroom car, for new Chinese acts #90 (NYC 10503) was replaced by AMT 4590 (UP 5550 Built. ACF 1964) The worsening condition of #81 (ex-MC 244) combination generator and pie car was cause for priorities to be re-evaluated to speed up the replacement of this car by swapping a flat car in place of a tunnel car on the Red Unit. The tunnel car was a three axle 85' baggage car ex-Red Unit #28 UP 6322. Built by ACF 1961 and would make the second three axle generator car. Performers' car #89 (NYC 10511) was replaced by AMT 5267 (SCL 5267 Bit. P. S. 1955).

1986

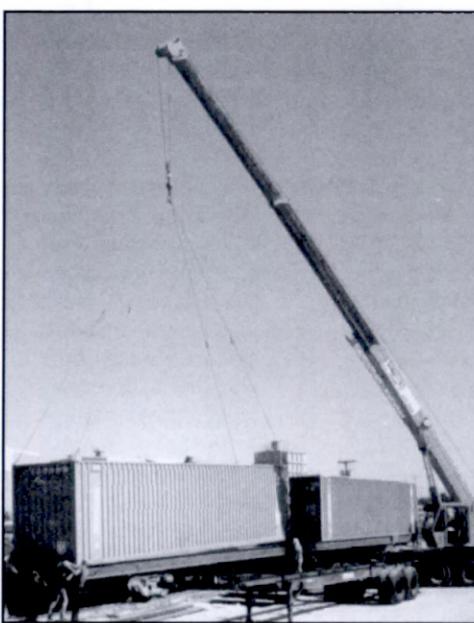
In 1986 these number changes were made to Blue Unit coaches. (old/new) 74/74; 75/75; 76/77; 77/80; 78/78; 79/79; 80/81; 81/82; 82/76; 83/83; 84/85; 85/91; 86/87; 87/88; 88/89; 89/92; 90/93; 91/84; 92/90; 93/94; 94/86; 95/95; 96/96; 97/97; 98/98; 99/99 and 100/100. No changes or additional cars were

made on the Blue Unit.

The first Sells-Floto storage car was made from a channel side 85' flat car with two 8' X 8' X 40' containers welded to the flat car with the space between the containers in the center of the car filled with large double loading doors on either side. This first container car was put on the Red Unit as car #35. This type of car was duplicated until there were two such cars on both units. The 85' flat cars that had been replaced by 89'4" flat cars were used to build these new container storage cars. The original Bi-Level flat car built by Ringling in 1972 needed replacing. A new Bi-Level flat car was proposed for the Blue Unit. The old Bi-Level car was cut down, reconditioned and made into a standard 89'4" long ACF type flat car.

Two aluminum Union Pacific chair cars were purchased from the Providence & Worcester Railroad. They were P&W 4583 (UP 5543) and P&W 4594 (UP 5554). They were placed in rail car inventory for future recycling projects. A train recycling planning meeting was held in March to define each unit's needs, attended by both unit General Managers and Trainmasters. Cars being recycled for the Blue Unit consisted of two 89'4" long flat cars which replaced two 85' long flat cars. A new Bi-Level replaced the old one and a perform-

Building a new concession storage car in 1989. Author's photo.



ers car #88 (NYC 10511) to be replaced by AMTK 5267.

Change in Policy

Bill Misuria, Director of Ringling-Barnum Transportation, said he was now using the 50 year rule basis, which at present is the only guideline we have to determine the future workload of the Train Recycling Department in order to keep both Red and Blue units from falling behind with outdated cars. This statement extends the useful life of all rail cars in the Ringling-Barnum fleet another ten years.

Japan

The company was about to embark on a new venture that would involve building an entire new unit to tour major cities in Japan and be a three ring presentation, equal in size and performance to the two domestic units.

Reassignment of company personnel and company resources were channeled into the new foreign unit, known as the Gold Unit. This all new show was built in Florida and transported to Japan using sea/land 40' containers transported on container ships. All performing animals, elephants, horses, wild animals and grooms would also travel by container ship to Japan. Other personnel would travel by air. Departure from Florida occurred in mid 1988. The tour would take two years.

Domestically, the Blue Unit had a new production for 1988-1989. Five and ten year projections identified the train recycling needs of each unit. Further coach replacement would continually up-grade the railway car fleet.

1987-1989

The Blue Unit coaches stabilized at this point, although interior remodeling was carried out at the end of each season. New acts had different requirements and some staterooms were renovated for the new occupants. Recycling of equipment cars added new 89'-4" long flat cars that would replace the 85' long flat cars. An additional flat car was added for 1989, bringing the total of flats to thirteen, excluding the Bi-Level flat.

1989 Coaches

The 1989 coaches were: 73 WP 801 Shop car; 74 AMTK 4893; 75 AUT 604-SCL 6404; 76 AMTK 2803-C&O 2618; 77 AUT 634-RFP 410; 78 B&O 7103; 79 AUT 633-RFP 409; 80 UP 6327 Generators; 81 B&O 7040; 82 AUT 606-SCL 6406; 83 NYC 10501 (oldest #2 1976-1989); 84 AMTK 2805-B&O 7050; 85 AUT 612-L&N 3460; 86 AMTK 5299-SOU 5299; 87 AMTK 6061-UP 5493; 88 AMTK 5267-SCL 5267; 89 AUT 610-SCL 6404; 90 B&O 7042; 91 B&O 7046; 92 AWK 4590-UP 5550; 93 UP 6320 Generators; 94 AMTK 4595; 95 RI 820 (no vestibules)(oldest #1 1969-1989); 96 NYC 10502 (oldest #3 1976-1989); 97 UP 5466 (ex Red Unit #41); 98 AUT 611-SCL 6400; 99 N&W O-WAB JPC 2 and 100 NYC 10500 storage car. Only one of the original coaches remained in the consist, RI 820, the only car from the "Golden State Rocket." This car had been remodeled inside and rebuilt several times during its twenty years of service, and was the matriarch of the fleet.

Railway Equipment Identification Change

Railroads have traditionally identified privately owned equipment by suffixing an X after the owners call or reporting marks. Ringling-Barnum used RBBX and the car number. These car numbers were insignificant to the railroad, other than every railroad car must have some kind of number, called reporting marks. The Ringling and Strates trains are referred to as "unit trains," in other words, the complete train is transported between cities as one unit. Some switching is required after the trains arrival in a location. This is all spelled out in the contract between the railroad and the show.

At the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey adopted a railroad car numbering system to accomplish two objectives. One, a car number that would stay with each car, regardless of which unit the car was with. Second, it would not matter where the car was located in the



The new numbering had five digits.
Author's photo.

train. Additionally, a "House" number would be used in conjunction with the RBBX number. These house numbers usually ran consecutively and helped show personnel locate their car. If the car's location in the train is changed, its house number would change also, keeping the house numbers consecutive.

When a new car is purchased, every effort is made to determine its original manufacturer, and which railroad it was made for and the year it was built. This number is steel stamped into the center sill at both ends of the car, on opposite sides of the center sill. The car is then given a RBBX five digit number, which stays with the car as long as it is in Ringling-Barnum ownership.

Number Code

First Digit, Car Type: 4 Coach, 6 Stock Car, 8 Flat Car, 9 Parts Car (Holding number, short baggage cars, usually scrapped for parts. Second Digit, Built by (manufacturer): 0 ACF, 1 Budd, 2 Pullman, 3 St. Louis Car, 4 Bethlehem, 5 Maxson, 6 W&K. Third Digit, Car Material: 0 Aluminum, 1 Carbon Steel, 2

Stainless Steel over Carbon Steel, 3 Stainless Steel. Fourth and Fifth Digit, Number Of Cars In A Series: 1 thru 99.

Automatic Equipment Identification (AEI)

AEI is a radio frequency based identification system used to automatically identify over 1.3 million railcars in North America as well as trucks, trailers, containers and automobiles.

When a car goes through the recycling system and before it is put into service with a unit, an electronic ID package, (AEI) is attached to the car. This devise can be read by every railroad that the car travels on by way of electronic reading devices located in strategic locations of each railroad. These reading devices are used to print out train orders and consists. All railroad equipment have these ID devices and railroads use the system to bill car owners for use and maintenance.

The AEI electronic package is approximately 2" wide x 1" thick x 12" long. This package is attached to the car permanently on the side sill of the car body and is almost indestructible, however with the use of special tools, they can be removed and reprogrammed. The railroads' reading devices can capture the cars' ID and information with the train traveling at normal speeds.

Older systems required the cars to pass the readers at a restricted speed. Ringling-Barnum moved into the 21st Century big time and also uses a Global Positioning System (GPS) to keep track of where each unit is at all times, using cellular phones and pagers. It is instant communications.

Material for this article has been taken from the author's personal collection of notes and memories. Railroad passenger car identifications have been taken from many books published on passenger cars.

The author was employed by Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus from January 1975 to April 1999. Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey is a trade mark owned by Feld Entertainment Inc.

FROM RAGS TO RICKETTS THE ROOTS OF CIRCUS IN EARLY GOTHAM

By William L. Slout

This paper was presented at the 2004 Circus Historical Society Convention.

Early performances in the city of New York have been reported in various sources over the years, so revealing them here is not original. Rather, the objective within these pages is to place events into a sequence that reveals the progressive nature and increasing popularity of entertainments, as populations increase and the city expands from the Battery and moves up town.

A century before the canvas pavilion was adopted for exhibition purposes showmen relied on semi-permanent or permanent structures for such use. The temporary venues were just that, and, like anything temporary, the life span was short. Permanent buildings, on the other hand, are a symbol of longevity, reassurance that something important has been established. For example, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when expanding railroad mileage westward created new towns and cities, one of the first buildings that legitimized their existence was an opera house or theatre. So it is logical that we begin our New York narrative with just that.

The first permanent structure for public amusement viewing in New York was a theatre. Opened on December 6, 1732, it was a primitive affair built by Rip Van Dam, a bulbous Dutchman who owned a warehouse at Maiden Lane and Pearl Street, at the tip of Manhattan, adjacent to Fort George, the loft of which he converted for theatrical use.

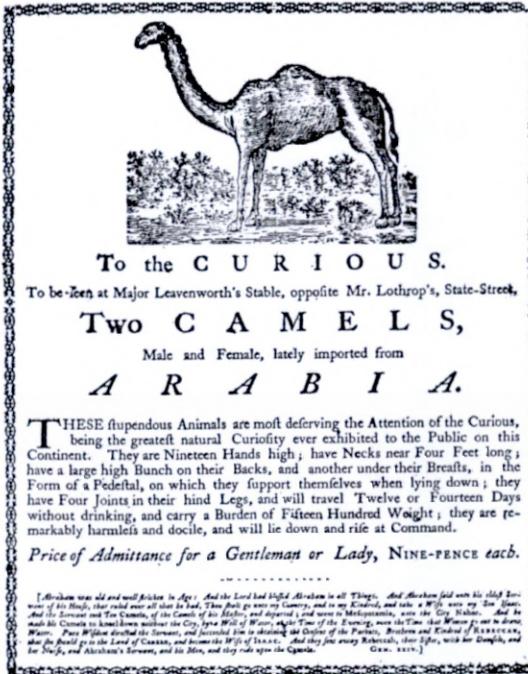
Van Dam was a native of Albany. He moved to New York City and became a wealthy merchant and ship owner, and for many years served on the city

counsel, during which time he sired fifteen children.

His converted loft appears to have been called the New Theatre, which might suggest there was an old one somewhere; but I do not believe that to be a fact. It seated about 300 spectators, who squatted on benches and watched the proceedings by dim candlelight. The only stove, being in the makeshift lobby, was a fire hazard and of so little use that during really cold weather the patrons brought foot warmers to survive the lengthy programs. An indication of the comportment of the clientele was a sign that urged them not to spit.¹ This early temple of drama existed only a year or two. It will be after the Revolution before other permanent houses of entertainment are established.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the economy of New York was in the midst of an upsurge,

Handbill for camels exhibited in 1787. All illustrations from the Pfening Archives.



primarily due to the exporting of sugar to England. What had been a luxury only the privileged could afford in the previous century, the British consumption of sugar had at least doubled by 1730 due to improved purchasing power and falling prices. Now it was a daily ritual of middle class life to partake of sweetened chocolate or coffee, accompanied by candies, cakes or bread spread with molasses. The British sweet-tooth had sweetened the pocketbooks of New York merchants. With this, the city saw an expansion of trade in other areas as well. Between 1694 and 1720 over fifty new tavern keepers, grocers and wine sellers were granted licenses. New inns provided housing for seamen and business travelers. Retail shops also boomed.²

Yet there was a wide divide between the "haves" and "have nots," and by 1730 a depression was taking root. There were some 8,600 people living in the city at this time, but a mere 140 merchants and landowners owned half the taxable wealth. One third of the white population was destitute.³ It is little wonder, then, that traveling exhibitions were slow to develop.

There were, however, some eighteenth century circus fore-runners that offered entertainments and exhibitions which early-on took the place of museums, menageries, mechanics fairs and hall shows, presented at such sites as taverns, storefronts, open fields or city squares. Booth shows with small collapsible stages were erected on the street, in the smallest of buildings, by the seaside, or most any place people were in the habit of congregating. These were the type of amusements that could be easily transported from place to place on horseback, a small wagon, or even on the back of a single operator.

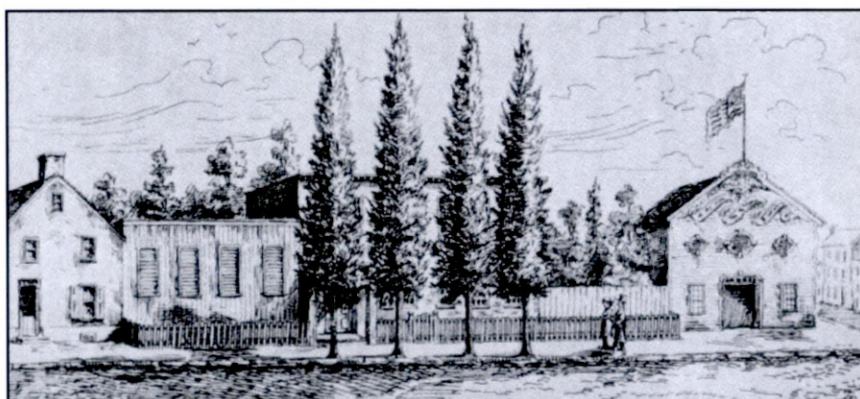
Mechanical wonders were popular items of display for which admission was charged. There was a man named Blanchard who revealed a carriage that was made to run without horses, described as an automaton eagle which, when guided by a passenger, could move at the speed of a stagecoach. There were scientific phenomena such as a way of electrifying several persons at the same time so fire darted from all parts of their bodies; or a contrivance that created by luminous rays the thirteen stars of the United States, and other pieces of artificial fireworks. There was even something called a "philosophical optical machine." Barnum must have loved the thought of them all.

Forerunners of the menagerie date as far back as 1728 when New Yorkers were exposed to a lion at the Jamaica Fair. The fair was originated this year as a site for selling merchandise and fine horses.

In 1733 a camel was on exhibit at the sign of the Cart and Horse. An item in the *Gazette* read: "NOTICE is hereby given to all Persons, that there is come to Town, a very Wonderful and Surprising Creature to all Persons in these Parts of the World; and it is in Scripture the very same Creature which is there called a CAMEL. It is impossible to describe the Creature; and therefore all Persons of ingenious Curiosity have an Opportunity of satisfying themselves. The Creature was brought with great Difficulty from the Deserts of Arabia in that Quarter of the World which is called Asia to New England; a Curiosity which never was in this Country, and very likely will never be again." The price of viewing was one shilling for adults and six pence for children.⁴ Of course the Curiosity was seen again; in fact a pair of them, when in 1787 they were housed for show at Stevens' Livery Stables on Wall Street.

Two years later New Yorkers viewed a collection of animals that included a male and female Ourang Outang, a sloth, a baboon, an anteater, crocodile, lizard, swordfish, variety of snakes, a tiger, buffalo, and a selection of birds. Sounds like a menagerie to me.

It was announced in June of 1739: "Soon will come to town the up right



The Vauxhall Garden overlooking the Hudson River.

German Hans who understands several languages, the most ingenious Horse that ever was seen in this Country." It was trained to salute the spectators, find hidden objects, answer questions with the nod of the head, identify playing cards and commit other unusual tricks, this act being shared with a clown.⁵ A trained animal and a clown—at least the beginning of a circus program.

We learn of the appearance of a many talented Anthony Joseph Dugee, who, in 1752, arranged to perform in a new exhibition hall in Mr. Adam Van Denberg's Garden. Dugee cavorted on the slack-wire, balanced seven pipes on his nose, as well as a straw on the head of a drinking glass, juggled balls and danced the horn-pipe. He was accompanied by Mrs. Dugee, billed as the female Samson because of her ability to extend her body between two chairs while a 300-pound anvil on her breast was struck

The equestrian Jacob Bates.

with the sledgehammers of two men; and in the same position she stalwartly bore the weight of six men. Then, with an additional show of strength she lifted the anvil with her hair. Circus acts but not a circus.

It might also be noted that the first public pleasure grounds with the name of Vauxhall Garden was established in 1765 by Samuel Fraunces, a proprietor of various taverns. Although several summer gardens opened in the 1740s and 1750s, there were only two remaining at this time--Spring Garden and Catiemuts Garden. This new Vauxhall was located on a site overlooking the Hudson, near what is now a junction of Greenwich and Warren Streets. The place featured a wax museum, fireworks and afternoon teas. More gardens with the name of Vauxhall would appear later.⁶

The rough distinction made between an early "circus" and a "riding exhibition" or "riding school" is that the former has additional acts of amusement along with the riding itself, making it, the circus, a multi-act entertainment. Neverthe-



less, pre-circus riding exhibitions were, if nothing else, the roots of circus performance, for circus performances early on featured riding above all else. Such names as Sharp, Foulks, Bates, Pool and Ricketts represent the demonstration of riding as a pre-circus activity in this country. Four of these gentlemen appeared in New York City.

It was announced in Gaine's *New York Gazette* that Mr. Foulks would exhibit his skills of horsemanship on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, beginning the 20th of December 1771, "at a convenient place belonging to Mr. Joseph Bogart near the Windmill above the Slaughter House, in the Bowery." The Windmill referred to was located on the western part of the Bowery between Hester and St. Nicholas Streets. Tickets could be purchased for four shillings at the newspaper offices of Mi. Rivington and Mr. Gaine. The rider was said to have performed in England, Ireland and Scotland, so we can assume he was not native to this country. "If the weather should be bad," the announcement read, "the performance will be postponed to the next fair day," a confirmation that the event took place in an uncovered enclosure. Foulks went through a series of routines with one, two and three horses, which through the years have become familiar equestrian acts. In spite of the winter weather, performances continued into January. The only rival entertainment appearing during those cold months seems to have been an evening of legerdemain, of cups, balls and cards, by a Peter Sourville.⁷

Another equestrian, Jacob Bates, arrived in New York in the spring of 1773. According to Greenwood, Bates had performed "throughout the length and breadth of Europe," purportedly before many of the crowned heads. His portrait was drawn and engraved by G. P. Nusbiegel in 1766. It pictured him standing by his horse, while in the background were examples of his various feats being performed in a plot of ground much larger than a ring and cordoned off by what appears to be a rope. Some spectators are standing and others are sitting astride their mounts, giving them a better view of the action. We learn from the *Gazette* that



Mr. Ricketts.

Bates' New York performances were set for 5 p.m. and that there would be "proper seating for the ladies and gentlemen." The tickets for what was called "the first place" went for one dollar each; for the "second place," which could have been standing room, for four shillings. The announcement included a special request that Mr. Bates would "take it as a particular Favour if Gentlemen will not suffer Dogs to come with them." The show of horsemanship that took place at the Bull's Head in the Bowery beginning on the 2nd of June represented a much more civilized time of year than his predecessor, to be sure.⁸ The most interesting part of this visit was the introduction to this country of "Billy Button, or The Taylor Riding to Brentford," the equestrian burlesque of a tailor's difficulty in his journey to meet with a customer. Bates' performances continued through the summer until August 3rd, at which time the boards that formed his arena were offered for sale.⁹

We now take a hurdle over the next several years, during which entertainment possibilities were bleak due to the Revolutionary War and the strictures that were a by-product of it. In 1774 the First Continental Congress passed a resolution to suppress entertainments:

"We will, in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy and industry, and promote agriculture, arts, and manufactures of this country, especially that of wool; and will discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments."

We pick up our narrative in 1786, when Mr. Pool, billed as the first American to indulge in feats of horsemanship, arrived in New York for exhibitions on Tuesdays and Fridays beginning September 21st. His program reflected much of what Bates had done; and, indeed, Pool may have been a student of Bates. The site of his riding was advertised to be on the hill near the Jewish Burial Ground. This would be in the vicinity of Chatham Square.

At this time we have added to the program a band of music and a clown who entertained the ladies and gentlemen between the feats. Such an improvement would give Mr. Pool a chance to rest before his next equestrian challenge. The visit persisted until the first of November.¹⁰ Still not a circus, but at least we have a troupe of entertainers.

Enter the famous John Bill Ricketts, whose American beginnings were similar to the previous gentlemen, starting out with a riding school and riding exhibitions; but now, after having established himself in Philadelphia and elsewhere, and thereby adding acts to his equestrian program, he brings his troupe to Greenwich Street, near the Battery. Ricketts had an advantage over the previous equestrians due to population growth. At this time New York could boast of having over 33,000 residents, 5,000 more than Philadelphia.

Circus historian T. Allston Brown wrote of him in 1860: "John B. Ricketts, the proprietor, was a very gentlemanly and neat fellow in society and dressed in rather the English sporting style and was received with favor in the best circles. As a performer he never offended the eye by ungraceful postures or by the nude style of dressing that now prevails at the circus. His costumes were like

that of the actors on the stage-pantaloons, trunks full disposed, and neat cut jacket—which were sufficient to make ample display of his figure for all purposes of agility and grace.”¹¹

Ricketts' circus opened in New York August 7th, 1793, in a newly constructed arena, which, unlike his equestrian forerunners, was fully enclosed. Horsemanship and feats astride the running mounts were prominently featured in the programs, the kind that has become an inherent part of riding acts in the intervening years. However Ricketts' brother Francis was an acrobat, a Mr. Spinacuta was a rope-walker, a Mr. McDonald a clown and a boy named Strobach rode on Ricketts' shoulders in the “Flying Mercury,” all adding up to “circus.” An item in the New York Daily Advertiser suggested on August 10th that “the bleak blasts of the Hudson should no longer be avoided by the Beau Monde for you may yet see at the circus a collection of so much beauty, innocence and gaiety as ever appeared in any of the public ballrooms.” Performances were given daily at 4:00 p.m. until November 4th presumably terminating because the structure was not heated.¹² Thus ended the first of a series of visits by the historically famous company, a company that would singly “own” the circus rights to New York for the next four years.

There is an exception to this, an event that occurred the following year, when on September 10, 1794, an amusement credited to Thomas Swann opened near the Battery, where, Thayer suspects, was the site Ricketts had used. But was this really a circus? George C. D. Odell, the maestro chronicler of New York theatrical history, considered it more of a riding school. Still, there was at least a band of musicians, and by October 20 a troupe of dancing monkeys under the care of a Mr. Cressin. Most notably for posterity, however, there was an equestrienne, a Miss Johnson, billed as an American Lady, seemingly the first American of her gender to appear in the ring.¹³ This was Swann's first and last stand—a swan song, if you'll allow me—shortly he began a practice of veterinary medicine in Philadelphia.

Ricketts returned to New York City, opening on November 24th,

very shortly after Swann's departure, to spend the winter season at a new location at the southwest corner of Broadway and Exchange Alley (formerly Garden Street). At this time a grand entry was included in the program, adding a touch of spectacle and creating a tradition that has persisted to this day. Mr. McDonald did a burlesque riding act and something called “Polander's Tricks.” Ricketts carried Master Long in the “Flying Mercury,” there were pony races, and by early January a Mr. Embroise was offering Italian fireworks. Further, in March there was an act billed as “Indian chiefs” on horseback, which Thayer calls “the first example of a long association of American Indians, pseudo or otherwise, with the circus.” The run closed with a benefit for the poor on April 21, 1795.¹⁴

November through April seems like a long run for a city of now about 40,000 people,¹⁵ presented with a program limited in its variety over such a lengthy period. Still, there was little in the way of public amusements during the winter. The only major competitor was the John Street Theatre, exclusive in that it offered the higher class of drama. Perhaps a lack of competition, and the novelty for people unfamiliar with Ricketts' kind of entertainment, and a public obsession with and a dependence on horses, may be part of the answer.

Ricketts returned on September 16, but closed three days later because of an epidemic of yellow fever that ended any amusement activity for the month, perhaps disrupting his intentions of continuing through the winter again.

Yellow fever first hit New York in 1702 and reappeared almost annually well into the nineteenth century. It was an epidemic that continually interrupted popular entertainments, particularly in southern port cities like Charleston, New Orleans and

Mr. POOL,
*The first American that ever Exhibited
the following FEATS OF*
HORSEMANSHIP
On the Continent,

Intends Performing this Afternoon, on the Hill near the Jews Burial Ground, if the weather permits, if not, on the first fair day afterwards, except Sunday. Mr. Pool has erected a Menage, at a very considerable expence, with seats raised from the ground, for the convenient accommodation of those Ladies and Gentlemen who may please to honour him with their company.

*A CLOWN will entertain the Ladies
and Gentlemen between the Feats.*

1. MOUNTS a single Horse in full speed, standing on the top of the saddle, and in that position carries a glass of wine in his hand, drinks it off, and falls to his seat on the saddle.

2. Mounts a single Horse in half speed, standing on the saddle, throws up an Orange, and catches it on the point of a fork.

3. Mounts two Horses in full speed, standing on the saddles, and fires a pistol.

4. Mounts two Horses in full speed, with a foot in the stirrup of each saddle, from thence to the ground, and from thence to the tops of the saddles at the same speed.

5. Mounts two Horses in full speed, standing on the saddles, and in that position leaps a bar.

6. Mounts a single Horse in full speed, fires a pistol, falls backward, with his head to the ground, hanging by his right leg, and rises again to his seat on the saddle.

7. Mounts three Horses in full speed, standing on the saddles, and in that position leaps a bar.

After which Mr. Pool will introduce a very extraordinary Horse, who, at the word of command, will lay himself down and groan, apparently through extreme sickness and pain; after which he will rise and fit up like a lady's lap-dog, then rise to his feet and make his Manners to the Ladies and Gentlemen.

The entertainment will conclude with the noted scene, THE TAYLOR RIDING TO BRENTFORD.

* * Every time of Performance there will be new Feats.—Mr. Pool flatters himself the Ladies and Gentlemen who may be pleased to honour him with their Company, will have no reason to go away dissatisfied;—he even hopes to merit their approbation.

The doors will be opened at Three o'Clock, and the Performance will begin at Four in the afternoon precisely.

TICKETS to be had at Mr. CHILDS's Printing-Office, near the Coffee-House; Mrs. DELAMATER's, next Door to the Play-House; and at the PLACE OF PERFORMANCE. Price for the First Seats FOUR SHILLINGS—for the Second, THREE SHILLINGS.

†† Mr. Pool befeeches the Ladies and Gentlemen who honour him with their Presence, to bring no dogs with them to the Place of Performance.

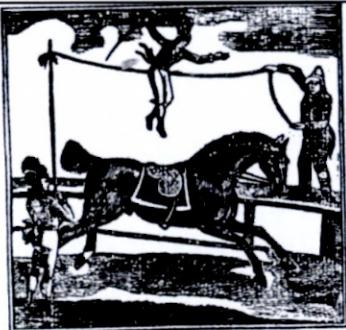
¶¶ The Exhibitions will be on TUESDAYS and FRIDAYS.

New York, September 21, 1786.

A 1786 newspaper ad for Mr. Pool.

Mobile.

At this time, 1795, New York authorities had been alerted that yellow fever was widespread in the West Indies; but in New York the summer, hot and humid as it was, showed no indication of a problem. It was



Ricketts'
NEW AMPHITHEATRE.

THIS afternoon, Saturday, May 30, will be performed, in addition to the great variety of EQUESTRIAN FEATS, a new exhibition, called the **EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS**,

[As described by Addison, in his *Travel through Egypt*] by eight persons dressed in character; forming the following changes:

- 1st. A grand entrance with a Roman column.
- 2d. An Egyptian archer.
- 3d. A Roman Spear.
- 4th. Lion's den down.
- 5th. Four archers forming a figure.
- 6th. A grand entrance of circler with charges.
- 7th. The world round upside down.
- 8th. Egyptian Pyramid.
- 9th. Roman monument.
- 10th. Egyptian port.
- 11th. Lion's den up.
- 12th. A march.

Mr. Ricketts will, for this evening only, ride a single horse in full speed, and perform

THE MANUAL EXERCISE,

With a FIRELOCK, in the character of an American Officer, going through all the different Manuvres.

Mr. Ricketts will leap from one horse in full speed,

OVER A RIBBON,

As depicted above.

Mr. Ricketts will also carry his young pupil, Master Long, on his shoulders in the attitude of a FLYING MERCURY.

On two horses in full speed. And a number of new feats, in addition to those already performed.

The Evening's Amusements will conclude with the **EGYPTIAN PYRAMIDS**.

The doors will be opened at five o'clock, and the performance will begin at a quarter before six.

**Tickets to be had at Col. Colman's Coffee House, at Mr. Mackay's, and Mr. Fisher's (late Bent's) Tavern, and at a Ticket Office, ONE DOLLAR—PIT, HALF A DOLLAR.*

A 1795 ad for Ricketts' New Amphitheatre, listing the Flying Mercury.

noticed, however, that mosquitoes were more numerous than usual, especially in the southeastern part of the city. Then, in mid-July, a health officer summoned to attend three sick seamen aboard a vessel in the East River caught the disease and died eight days later. More cases were in evidence along the waterfront. Many of the wealthy residents sent their families out of town in August; and, when the number of cases increased by September, those remaining shut their businesses and left for Greenwich, Harlem, and other nearby villages, leaving thousands of unemployed laborers to fend for themselves. The epidemic continued through October until it tapered off due to the cool weather; but not before it had claimed a record 732 victims.¹⁶

The cold weather came and went before New Yorkers were privileged to attend more of the performances.

The circus took up residency again at Broadway and Exchange Alley in May of 1796. Now it consisted of John Bill Ricketts, rider; William Sully, rider and clown; Francis Ricketts, acrobat; Mr. Reano, rope-walker; Mr. Langley, clown; and Mr. Spinacuta, rope-walker. Mrs. Spinacuta rode a two-horse act, "never before attempted by any female in America," later designated Roman riding. Performances were presented each Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday until July 29; then, after a respite of two months, there were six more dates between September 21 and 30.¹⁷

To create change, dramatic offerings were made as the season progressed. Most were on themes that were offshoots of English pantomime and fair booth shows common at this time. They were not new to New Yorkers, however, for as early as 1739 a pantomime was presented in the city at Mr. Holt's Long Room titled *Harlequin and Scaramouch, or the Spaniard Trick'd*, which could be seen for the admission price of five shillings.¹⁸

A new amphitheatre, located on the west side of Greenwich Street, just north of Rector, awaited Ricketts' next opening; which, according to the *New York Argus*, was delayed until March 16, 1797, because inclement weather had prevented the arrival of horses. The new, circular structure, for the first time in this city, included a stage and scenery along with the ring. The two performing areas were not physically accessible to one another at this time. The stage was simply alternated with the ring when dramatic-type interludes were presented. By the end of April a coffee shop was added for the pleasure of the patrons. The season ended July 12, 1797; but the company revisited Greenwich Street for a brief stay of two weeks in December of 1798. With that,

Ricketts was destined not to return to the city; and, paradoxically, the building he had occupied burned the following year.¹⁹ And with this, our narrative comes to an end.

Notes

1. Edward Robb Ellis, *The Epic of New York City* (New York: Kodansha International, 1997), 119.

2. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham, a History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119-124.

3. *Ibid.*, 151.

4. George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage, Vol. I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), 18.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Burrows and Wallace, 176. Joseph Delacroix opened a summer resort he called Vauxhall Garden in 1798, located just above Pine Street at 112 Broadway, where, for a small admission, patrons could buy ice cream or a glass of punch. The next year he purchased the property of Alderman Nicholas Bayard, up Broadway near Bunker's Hill. (The Bayards were connected with the Stuyvesants by marriage and were prominent and prosperous citizens. Their bouwerie was somewhere between 100 and 200 acres. In 1729, the Bayards erected a large building near City Hall as a sugar refinery. It was later, 1773, turned into a tobacco factory. It was William Bayard, the refiner of sugar, along with James Jauncy and Abraham Mortier, who, in 1760, purchased Richmond Hill, whereon they build the large wooden structure.)

This new place he also titled Vauxhall Garden. Here, patrons were served the usual delicacies and refreshing drinks as at the original site, along with music, fireworks and other entertainments; and there were two carriages that furnished accommodations of travel between these upper and lower gardens. But nothing stands still. Crowded out by the rapid growth of the city, Vauxhall moved uptown once again. The new construction became one of the early milestones in the development of amusement venues in the city. It coincided with the dawn of the new century and a population that had almost doubled in the last decade, the 1800 census reporting a total of 60,515 residing in the city. Modeled after the one with the same name in London, with long avenues of paintings, terminating with scenic renditions of a moonlight view, a hermit's cave, and other attempts at startling effects. There were alleys of Chinese lanterns, flying dragons and other samples of illumination. There was a saloon and a concert hall where young ladies sang to the accompaniment of a piano. The latticed bowers, half concealed from sight by foliage, furnished with tables and chairs for the quiet consumption of ice

cream and other delicacies, were chief attractions on the summer nights, where the daughters of well-to-do mechanics and substantial traders preferred to lounge with their admirers. (Vauxhall Gardens, London, a popular place of resort from the reign of Charles II almost to the end of the 19th century, was located on the Surrey side of the Thames, near Vauxhall Bridge. Originally called New Spring Gardens, they were developed around 1661. At first there were only a few walks and arbors where supper was served. It was remodeled and reopened on June, 7, 1732, with "every appointment possible." There were many rows of tall trees, paintings and statues, a music room with an orchestra of fifty musicians, rows of colorful lamps. In the middle of the garden were two semicircles in which small booths allowed patrons to sit and refresh themselves with wine, tea, coffee, or various delicacies. The Gardens were open every day except Sundays, from 7 May till September.)

7. Isaac J. Greenwood, *The Circus, Its Origins and Growth prior to 1835* (New York: 8 Dunlap Society Publications, N. S., 5), 48-51.

8. The Bull's Head was one of the memorable 18th century hosteries, frequented by the butchers and drovers, the place being located near the slaughter yards. A 1763 newspaper advertisement is quoted as follows: "The noted Inn and Tavern in the Bowery

Ricketts's New Circus,
GREENWICH-STREET.

THIS EVENING, April 1st, will be presented,
a grand display of
Horsemanship,
By Mr Ricketts, Mr. F. Ricketts, master Franklin, master Snyder and master Hutchins, a child of six years old, and has been pupil to Mr. Ricketts only 8 months, whose performances have been received with unabated applause both in this city and in Philadelphie.

The Famous American Horse Cornishanter, will at the word of command, *ungirth his fiddle*, and take it off his back, also will *open up a Handkerchief, glove &c.* This Horse was purchased in New-York, three years ago and cost only one hundred dollars.

Mr. Ricketts is conscious of his being the best trained *Horse in America.*

A song by Mrs. Chambers.

A new Ballet Dance, (for the last time) called,
THE COUNTRY WAKE;
Or, *The Frolicksome Grecian.*
First actor with a long, Mr. Chambers.
A triple handspike by Messrs. Durang, Ricketts, and Franklin. Sailors by the rest of the company.
First country girl with a song called, *The Cottage Maid*, by a lady, being her second appearance on the stage.

Country Jaffes by Mrs. Durang, Miss Sully, &c. &c. To conclude with the grand serious PAN-TOMIME. [For the last time] of The DEATH OF CAPTAIN COOK.

In act 3d will be introduced, a new grand funeral procession, attended by marines, sailors and savages.

Doors to be opened at 6 o'clock, and the performance to begin precisely at a quarter before 7.

Lower Boxes 8s — Upper Boxes 6s — Pit 4s.

Places in the Boxes to be taken at the Circus from 10 o'clock in the morning until 3 in the afternoon.

* * Days of performance, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

A newspaper ad for Ricketts New Circus from the April 1, 1797 New York *Mercantile Advertiser*.

Lane at the sign of the Bull's Head (where the slaughter house is now kept), lately kept by Caleb Hyatt, is now occupied by Thomas Bayeaux who is well provided with all the conveniences for travelers." Richard Varian, a successful butcher and superintendent of the public slaughterhouse, was proprietor of the inn from 1770 until the outset of the Revolution. By 1796 the property had come into the possession of Henry Astor, another butcher by trade and man of wealth by industry and ingenuity. The Bull's Head continued to be a meeting place of butchers and drovers until 1826, when it was razed to make way for the Old Bowery Theatre.

9. Greenwood, *op. cit.*, 48-51.
10. *Ibid.*, 61.
11. Allston Brown, *Amphitheatres and Circuses*, Borgo Press (San Bernardino, CA, 1994), 17.
12. Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus*, Vol. 1, 6.
13. *Ibid.*, 7.
14. *Ibid.*, 8-9.
15. The 1790 census recorded a population of 33,131.
16. Burrows and Wallace, *Op.Cit.*, 357.
17. Thayer *op. cit.*, 11-12.
18. Odell, taken from the New York *Weekly Courier*.
19. Thayer, *op. cit.*, 15-16.

Circus Fans, Friends, Owners, Producers, Performers, Modelbuilders, Windjammers, Employees, Historians, Patrons

Please Join the Effort of
The Outdoor Amusement Business Association's Circus Animal Protection Fund
dedicated to preserving the ancient tradition
of performing circus animals. Send a generous check to:

OABA Circus Fund • P.O. Box 582 • Hopkins, MN 55343-058

All donations exceeding twelve dollars will be sent one of OABA's new
2005 Circus Animal Fund Lapel Pins

ANIMAL DEPARTMENT

By RICHARD J. REYNOLDS III

LOTUS Grande Dame Of Circus Hippos

Lotus, a female Common or Nile Hippo was arguably the most famous of her species ever in America. She arrived here in 1903 for the Gollmar brothers, cousins of the Ringlings who, like their wealthier relatives, wintered their Gollmar Bros. Circus in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The *Sauk County Democrat* (Baraboo, 30 April 1903) told us that the hippo to become known as Lotus arrived in Baraboo on Sunday morning 26 April 1903, thus providing the exact date upon which she began her circus career.

Actually, if things had gone as planned the Gollmars would not have purchased Lotus, for they had rented Ringling's male hippo Pete for the 1903 tour. That requires some explanation. In 1890 Pete had become the first hippo to troupe with the Ringlings. This male had been in show business since 1881 when he was "imported from across the Atlantic" by the Janesville, Wiscon-



sin showman Burr Robbins for the circus that carried his name. (*Janesville's Rock County Recorder*, 18 March 1881).

In addition to Pete the Ringlings also had female Fatima. She was born at Central Park zoo on 4 September 1890. They got her in 1897 because of plans for two circuses for 1898 and wanted a hippo for each one. They made arrangements with the Robinson family of Cincinnati to stage the John Robinson Circus that

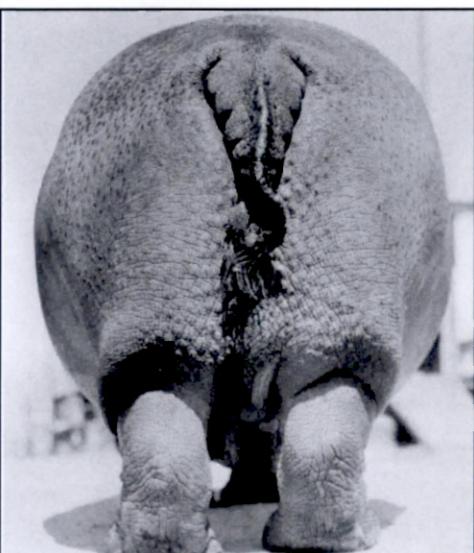
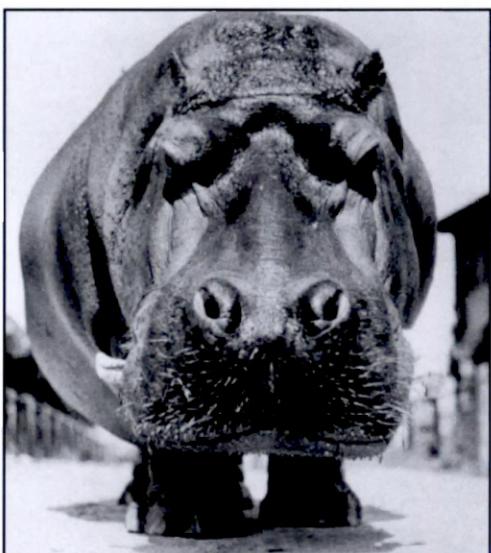
year (but only for that one year as it turned out). The Ringlings' decision to stage two shows was prompted by the fact that Barnum & Bailey, the biggest name in the business, was widely known to be heading for Europe. Indeed, it embarked for London in November 1897 and would stay overseas for five years. That left a void in the eastern market that was dominated by the Greatest Show On Earth. The brothers did not want to miss that opportunity. So they sent their namesake show east in 1898, leaving the Robinson

Lotus on Gollmar Bros. Circus around 1905. All photos are from the Pfening Archives.

circus to work their traditional Midwestern territory. [See: Richard Conover's *Give 'Em A John Robinson* (1965)]. I have not been able to determine which hippo went with which circus.

When the Ringlings went back to a

The Wallace rear view of Lotus.



Big Show Coming Here Soon ! GOLLMAR BROS.' Big, New Railroad Shows !

Triple Circus, Elevated Stages, Roman Hippodrome, Free Horse Fair, Gigantic Double Menagerie of Rare Wild Beasts of the Animal Kingdom

Herd of marching Elephants, Duchess, the largest Pachyderm that walks the earth—100 awe-inspiring circus acts—20 mirth-provoking jocular Clowns—A galaxy of male and female jockey riders—somersault riders—Charioteers—Roman standing riders — 100 stars of the arena world—Troupe of acrobatic, gymnastic Japanese performers — the European marvels, the Petit family in seemingly impossible acrobatic and gymnastic feats.

Gollmar Bros.' \$20,000 Feature, A Blood - Sweating Hippopotamus

Captured on the banks of the river Nile, a tremendous man-devouring, weird monster of the deep with an apex of a fearful size. On exhibition afternoon and evening in Gollmar Bros.' millionaire menagerie. His like does not exist on either continent, and never will, simply because this specimen of the animal kingdom is almost extinct.

Every morning at 10 o'clock rain or shine, a mammoth free street carnival and big double street parade, 7 open dens of ferocious wild beasts.

All gratuitously presented at 10 a. m. on the public highway. Two performances daily at 2 and at 8 o'clock. Doors open at 1 and 7 O'clock.

WILL EXHIBIT AT

Ashland, Mond'y July 20

Gollmar Bros. 1903 newspaper ad telling of Lotus.

single circus for 1899 et seq., they needed only one hippo. Though I cannot prove that they went exclusively with Fatima, there is rationale for that premise. For starters she was

younger. Additionally, female hippos are usually of much sweeter disposition than males, which are often nasty, dangerous animals. Females are smaller and therefore easier to accommodate in the usual hippo wagons. Moreover they do not have that "disgusting male habit," a reference to the boy hippo's spinning his tail like a propeller when he defecates, flinging feces in a wide arc. Though only natural as a territory marker, it can be offensive to the circus patron of refined sensibilities who, upon seeing the hippo standing up on the deck of his cage, gets too close when the hip lets it fly. No doubt partly for these reasons, the Ringlings considered Pete a surplus animal as the new century dawned.

For the 1902 season the Ringlings leased Pete to the Campbell Bros. Circus of Fairbury, Nebraska. The Campbells returned him at the end of that season. Pete was then rented to the Gollmar brothers for 1903. However, Pete up and died just two weeks before the season was to open.¹ That caught them in a bind with a lot of "Blood Sweating Behemoth" advertising paper on their hands. The hippo was to be the big feature. Newspaper ads had already been prepared proclaiming, in the finest tradition of circus bombast, as follows:

"Gollmar Bros.' \$20,000 Feature --
The Only REAL LIVING HIP-

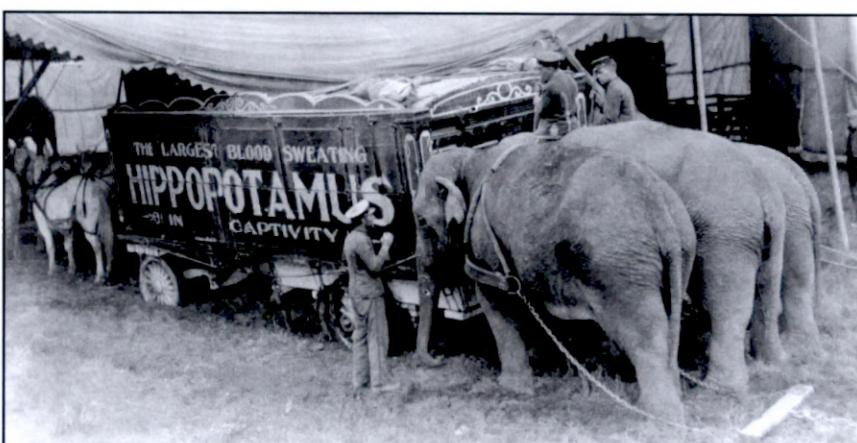


Another view of Lotus on the Gollmar Bros. Circus.

POPOPAMUS -- in captivity; a savage blood sweating terror of the River Nile; the weird man-slaying monster; the only one in the known world on exhibition; afternoon and evening in the Gollmar Bros.' millionaire menagerie." (*Sauk County Democrat*, Baraboo, 30 April 1903)

The late Judge Robert Gollmar of Baraboo, son of co-owner Fred Gollmar, told the story in his book, *My Father Owned a Circus* (1965). According to the Judge, when Pete suddenly died his father made frantic calls and finally located a two and a half-year-old hippo in Hoboken, New Jersey. It turned out to be Lotus. Animal dealer Carl Hagenbeck of Hamburg Germany owned her. Gollmar bought the hippo sight unseen. In a seller's environment like that, the old German got a high price, \$4,000. Though five times less than claimed in the ads (see above), the price was nevertheless very high for a small circus. The Gollmar ledgers show that she was the most

Shoving Lotus' cage into the Barnes menagerie, 1924.





Lotus cage in the Barnes winter quarters October 23, 1928.

expensive animal they ever purchased. Judge Gollmar, born in 1903, the same year that Lotus arrived, told me that his father would joking-

carnival operator, did not tour a circus the next year, and instead, had Lotus with his carnivals (Great Patterson Shows in 1918) and (Patterson and Kline Shows in 1919). He sold her to Al G. Barnes in September 1919 when the Barnes circus was in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Barnes made a star out of Lotus. She was a staple of his shows. She was a very gentle animal, and at each perform-



Lotus in the Barnes winter quarters in 1926.

ly say that Lotus cost him a lot more than his newborn son.

In late 1916 the Gollmars sold Lotus (plus the rest of their circus) to James Patterson who had her with his Patterson-Gollmar Circus in 1917. Patterson was mostly a

Lotus on the Barnes show in 1934.

ance she would either be led around the arena or would pull a high-wheeled cart around the track. Ringling gained control of the Al G. Barnes circus in 1929, but the new owner continued to feature Lotus in its performances. [For 1937 and 1938 the Sells-Floto title was appended to that of Barnes. It was purely a name addition, for Sells-Floto had been shuttered forever in Peru at the end of its 1932 tour.]

Lotus wound up being the most photographed hippo in circus history. With Barnes wintering in the Los Angeles area, she often posed for pictures with Hollywood celebrities. Our hippo appeared in two Johnny Weissmuller Tarzan movies

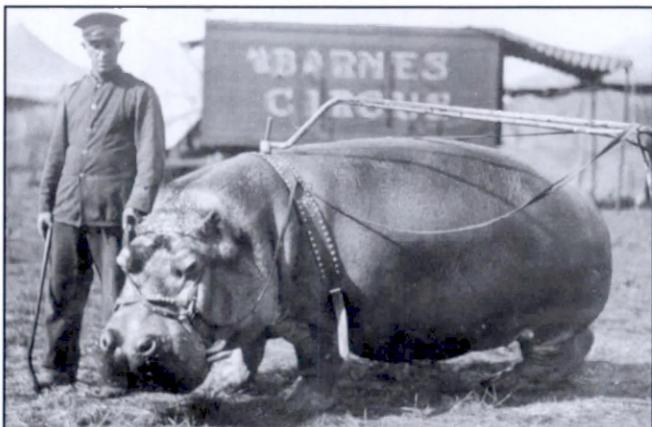
produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, *Tarzan The Ape Man* (1932) and *Tarzan and his Mate* (1934). For *Ape Man* she was joined by six other hippos shipped to Los Angeles in October 1931. They came from the Peru, Indiana winter quarters of the Hagenbeck Wallace and Sells Floto circuses. They were used to film a segment in which hippos attacked the rowboats of the great white hunters. It was shot in Lake Sherwood, California. The location is near Westlake Village and Thousand Oaks in Ventura County. A lot of jungle theme movies were made there.

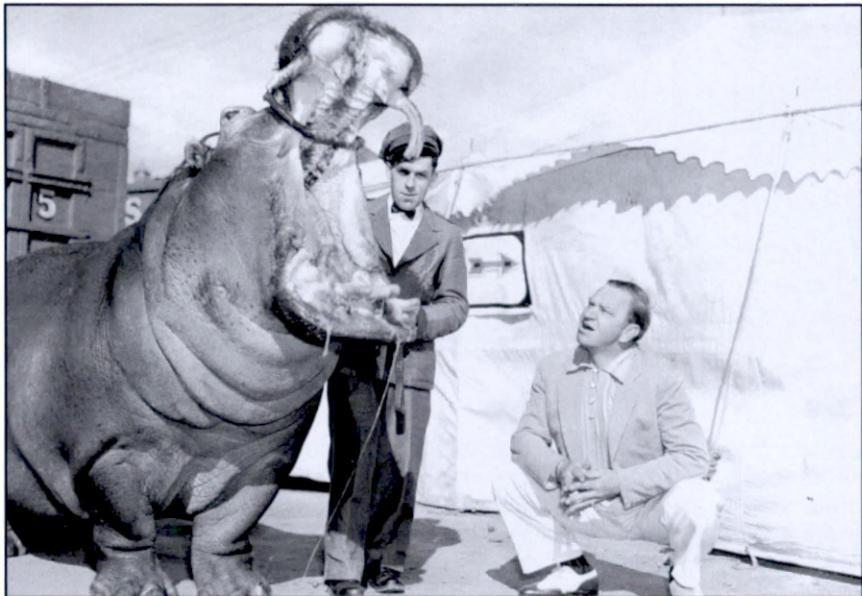


Lotus on Al G. Barnes around 1935.

Lotus became a real celebrity when photographer Bob Wallace took "fore and aft" photos of her that were printed, full size, on two pages of the 8 February 1937 issue of *Life* magazine. No other hippo ever got such "press." Sixteen years later the same pictures were published as a "Circus Classic" in Ringling-Barnum's 1953 route book (p.29). The "fore" view was also sold as a post card by RBBB.

This writer first saw Lotus in 1938 in Atlanta with the "Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Combined Circus presenting Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey." That overlong title was the result of the addition of Ringling acts and equipment to Barnes/S-F. A strike in Scranton, Pennsylvania had closed RBBB in June of that year. So management sent a lot of RBBB to its subsidiary show. The augmentation doubled the size of the Barnes circus. My first glimpse of the famous hippo came during the Sunday set up (Nov. 6th) on Atlanta's old Highland





Lotus and actor Wallace Berry on Barnes in 1937.

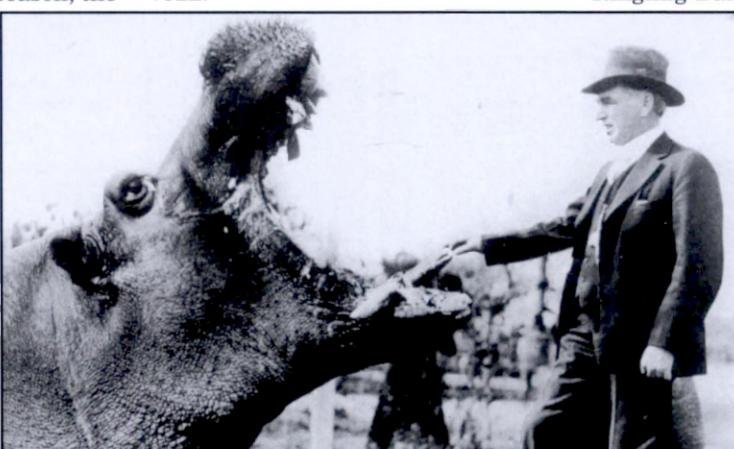
Avenue showgrounds. Her cage wagon was spotted on the lot before being taken into the menagerie tent. We (my Mother, Father, and I) joined a group of people gathered around it. A keeper removed one of the sideboards, and there was Lotus. The keeper had a hose and must have been replenishing her tank. I recall that he sprayed her with water (and probably put in some feed as well). Two days later, Tuesday November 8th, my Father took me to the matinee. I remember that it was a cold and blustery day. Lotus did her famous walk around the hippodrome track. Right in front of us she stopped and opened her cavernous mouth for a treat of bran tossed in by her keeper. From that moment on she was my favorite circus animal.

At the end of that 1938 season, the Barnes circus was subsumed into Ringling-Barnum and Lotus then went into the menagerie of the Greatest Show On Earth. In addition to being a menagerie attraction in 1939, she also did her trademark walk-around with the Big One that year, but that marked her last turn as part of the circus performance itself. However, she was to be seen in the RBBB menagerie

every season thereafter through 1942.

There was no common hippo on the Big One in 1943. Because of war-time restrictions imposed by the Office of Defense Transportation (ODT) the show was reduced in size that year and the menagerie exhibit was omitted. Instead they carried eight cage wagons and kept them in the backyard for use in the spec. It was a replica of a street parade. However, there was a hippo in that procession around the big top. It was a pigmy named Betty Lou, a familiar Ringling animal in her own right. Doubtlessly, she was selected over Lotus because she and her cage wagon were so much smaller and lighter than the massive den for Lotus and therefore easier to pull around the hippodrome track.

Al G. Barnes with Lotus around 1922.



Lotus stayed back in Sarasota winter quarters in 1943 with a male named August who went back to 1910 as a circus hippo. Lotus returned to the road with RBBB in 1944 when it once again carried its menagerie. To begin that tour, the show took out three hippos in three different cage wagons (a circus first). The hippos were the aforesaid pigmy Betty Lou plus two of the Nile species, Lotus and Chester. The last named was also a female. Her manly sounding moniker came from the fact that she was born in Chester, Pennsylvania on Hagenbeck Wallace in 1935. She had been a peripatetic animal, seeing earlier service on Hagenbeck-Wallace (1935); in the Detroit zoo (where she was loaned from 1936 into 1938); RBBB in 1938-1939; and Cole Bros. in 1940-43 (also a loan--to replace Cole's pigmy hippo that died in the 20 February 1940 fire at Rochester, Indiana winter quarters). Chester returned for good to Ringling-Barnum in 1944.

Ringling's big top burned up in Hartford, Connecticut on 6 July 44 with a horrible loss of life (167 people killed). The show went back to winter quarters to regroup. It resumed the tour in August playing open-air engagements in stadiums. Lotus did not go back out and remained in winter quarters while Chester made the stadium tour. 1944 was Lotus' last year on the road. For its common hippo the show then toured with the much younger Chester. I saw the show in 1945 and in 1947-1950 and can attest that it was Chester, not Lotus, in the menagerie. This was verified in 1966 interviews with Cecil R. Montgomery (1902-1977), former Ringling-Barnum menagerie superintendent.

The 1952 and 1953 route books suggested that Lotus was in the menagerie in those years, but Montgomery assured me that was wrong. It was Chester.

According to Montgomery, Lotus was bred by the male August at Sarasota and produced a calf that was born there. Unfortunately the calf drowned in the

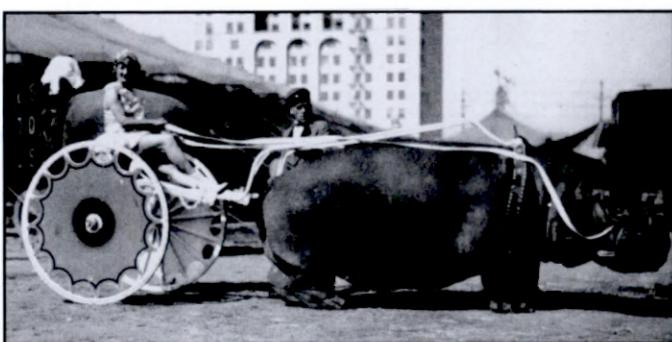
pool. Montgomery was uncertain of the date, but it must have been in the 1940s. She would have been at or over forty years of age at the time.

Lotus's last moment of glory came in Cecil B. DeMille's Oscar winning 1952 movie *The Greatest Show On Earth*. Montgomery told me that he had her taken out of her enclosure to be walked alongside the circus train in front of the cameras in the loading scene at Sarasota winter quarters. That sequence was filmed on 26 February 1951.² She was thus the only hippo ever to have appeared in an Academy Award "Best Picture."

But, her days were then numbered.

Your writer saw Lotus in her pool in Sarasota on 15 March 1953 and again, for the last time, on 14 March 1954. On that visit the keepers told me she was very feeble, hardly able to get out of the water. She died later that year, in mid to late October as best I can figure it. Dr. William Y. Higgins, one of the show's veterinarians, returned to Sarasota from the circus in early September 1954 to look after the animals in winter quarters. Louis Reed, noted elephant trainer, was also there breaking twenty new young Asian elephants scheduled to go out in 1955.³ Both were there when Lotus died. Higgins told me (1966 interview) that he and Reed had her removed from her pool and buried on the property. There was huge empty section in the rear

Lotus' cage wagon on the Barnes train in 1937.



Lotus with cart on Al G. Barnes in 1937.

of the winter quarters that served as an animal graveyard. Before she was interred, the men popped out her tusks with a big wrench. Menagerie boss Montgomery got them, and he, in turn, gave them to me. They are the prizes of my collection.

Altogether, Lotus was a circus animal for 51 years and 6 months. Adding that to her estimated age of two and a half upon her arrival in 1903 would have made her at or about 54 when she died. That is one of the world's best longevity records for a common hippopotamus. When she died, the late Dr. William M. Mann, legendary director of Washington's National Zoo, felt as though he had lost a friend. He said that she was a most unusual hippo. She loved to travel but most remarkable of all she obviously liked people. Instead of displaying a surly hippo resentment at the crowds of human beings that

always surrounded her, she thoroughly enjoyed being a circus star. "Everybody is missing the fat girl," said Dr. Mann, "that's for sure."⁴

Lotus was indeed the Grande Dame of circus hippos.

Endnotes

1. An old hippo died at Ringling quarters in Baraboo on 22 February

1910. *Billboard*, 12 Mar. 1910, (p. 19) erroneously identified him as Pete. Not so, the 1910 deceased was a male named Dick. He had joined Sells Bros. in 1880 and was sent to Baraboo when its later amalgam, Forepaugh-Sells, was shelved in



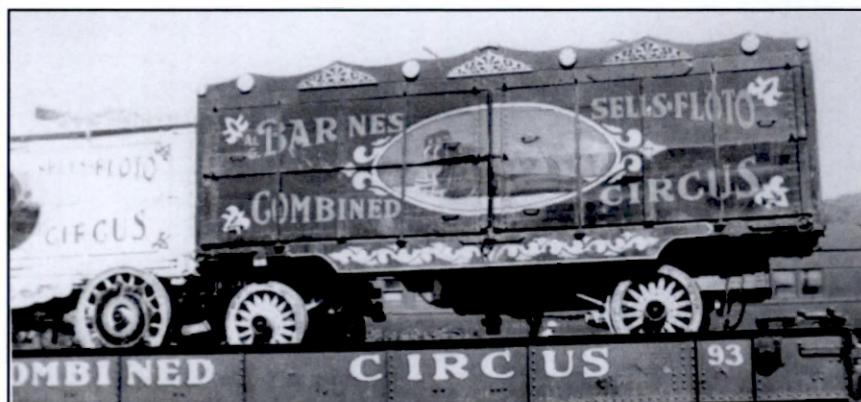
Lotus on Ringling-Barnum in 1939.

November 1907. The *Baraboo News*, 3 March 1910, identified the dead hippo as the former Sells Bros. animal. Rest assured, Pete died in 1903 as described above.

2. For the date of the hippo filming see: Jerry Digney's "Cecil B. DeMille's Greatest Show On Earth - Film Epic 40 Years Ago," *Bandwagon*, November-December 1991.

3. A *Billboard* article (October 23, 1954, p. 60), by-lined in Sarasota on October 16th told of Higgins and Reed being at the winter quarters and said that the animals there included "one hippo." That would have to be Lotus, meaning that she was still alive on October 16th or at least was there when the information for that item was gathered. She must have died around that date.

4. Dr. Mann was quoted in Harman W. Nichols' "Favorite Circus Fat Lady," *Bandwagon*, 17 March 1955, p. 8.



IN MEMORIAM

Bobby Gibbs Good Bye, Old Friend

By Jim Alexander

In early June 2004 I spent two days riding with Bobby has he drove 40,000 pounds of bananas from Galveston to Dallas. The time was an opportunity to visit with an old friend, an introduction to trucking, and an attempt to interview Bobby for a potential paper on his life. I've known him for over 39 years and have heard most of his stories. On this visit I was hoping for historical accuracy as much as entertainment. I think the following account is as factual as possible considering the subject.

Robert Eugene "Bobby" Gibbs was born on April 29, 1939 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was the first child of Robert and Gracie Gibbs. The Gibbs family lived in Cincinnati until "Butch," his family nickname, was 10 years old. The family then moved to the small farming community Miller, Missouri to join other family. Bobby's father found a job as an appliance salesman in Springfield, Missouri and would eventually go on to own the largest appliance store in southwest Missouri.

Bobby's first circus memory was a school trip to the Gil Gray Show at the Springfield Shrine Auditorium when he was 11 years old. When Dolly Jacobs got the elephants Modoc, Judy, and Dumbo to crawl through the narrow doorway and perform tricks in the ring he was hooked. He wanted to work with elephants and applied to be a groom. Show personnel didn't permit him to work with the pachyderms but they did let him assist Portis and Mary Sims with their ponies during the Springfield stand. So attracted to circus at the end of the date young Gibbs unsuccessfully attempted to run away with the show. Every year in Springfield from then on Bobby would work as a groom during the date, eventually with Hazel King's liberty act, and every year he'd try to run away. Sometimes he'd get to

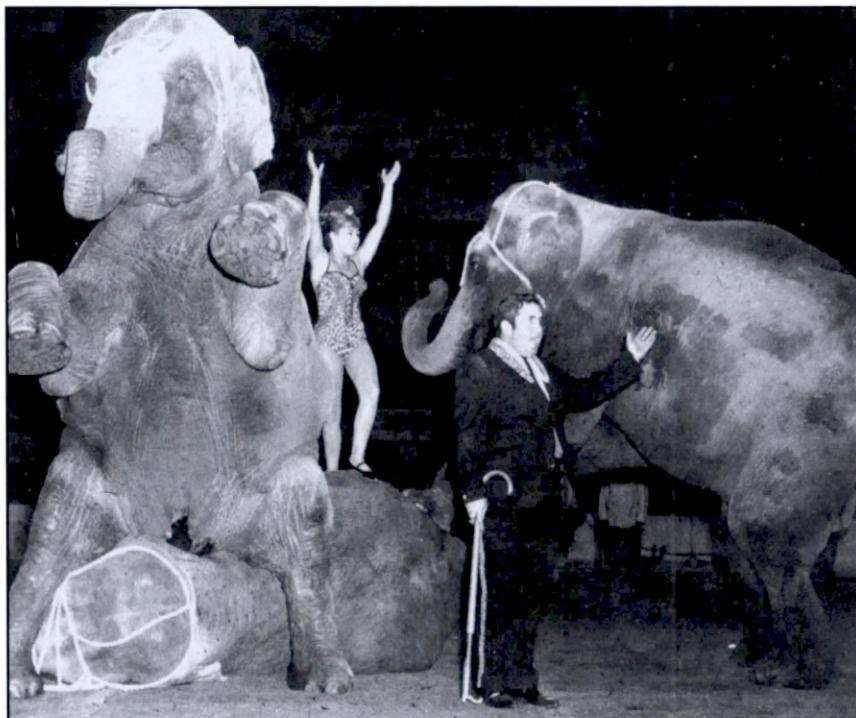
Joplin, Missouri or maybe Muskogee, Oklahoma before his father could retrieve him. When he'd get home he would hide his "circus clothes" to preserve the aroma of pachyderms but his mother would find them and toss them in the wash.

When Bobby was 15 his parents agreed that he could work for Hazel King in the summer as long as he returned to school. The Gibbs family, now four boys and two girls, would meet the Gil Gray Circus in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Bobby would stay with the show until it was time to return to Central High and the family home in Springfield. After graduating from high school Gibbs attended Southwest Missouri State University working toward a career as a veterinarian. The thought of performing surgery and other medical procedures wasn't as desirable as

Bobby and Rosa Gibbs in the early days.

performing in the circus ring. After two years at SMSU he decided to join the circus full-time.

Returning to the Gil Gray show Bobby became an assistant in the elephant department under Johnny Herriott. Later, his parents purchased an act of three dwarf zebus that performed a liberty act for Bobby. He joined the Hamid-Morton Circus with the act and also worked with the elephants. In addition to the circus he also presented animals at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City. It was during Bobby's time on the Hamid show that he met Rosa Garzon, a flyer with the Flying Padillas. Bobby and Rosa were married in Springfield, Missouri on October 27, 1964. In 1965 Bobby worked for King Amusement Corp. of Mt. Clemens, Michigan presenting a small animal circus attraction for the company's ride operation. The route was a series of K-Mart stores beginning in the South. The animals



included an elephant (Wanda), a former Hunt Bros. liberty act (4), a dog act (3), and Gibbs' zebras. Rosa also performed a web number. Bobby left King in the fall and went to Texas to work props on the Shrine dates.

During the Texas Shrine Circus dates Bobby made arrangements with D. R. Miller to lease three elephants beginning in 1966. The elephants, Shirley, Marie, and Ione, were well trained, and after a little practice, performed smoothly. Work, even with the added attraction of the Royal Hindu Zebus, was a little sparse in the beginning but began to pick-up by the end of the year. With little money for advertising Bobby used the PR approach, sending items to any publication that might publish news about his acts and bookings. The Gibbs elephants became a fixture on Shrine dates and fairs. In 1969 he followed Johnny Herriott, presenting animals at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Gibbs didn't have the only independent elephant act in the 1970's so to increase bookings he began purchasing several trained animal acts. He sold the zebras in the late 1960's because they were more difficult for the grooms to handle than the elephants. By the end of the 70's in addition to the elephants and Rosa's aerial turns Bobby offered liberty ponies (6), dogs (7), pigmy goats (5), a mixed act with a camel, llama, and pony, and liberty white mules (6). The mule act became the "Siberian Zebra Fantasy" when the mules were dyed to look like zebras. (Bobby felt the words "Siberian" and "Fantasy" would alert most people they weren't really zebras.) In 1971 at the CWM Bobby lost the elephant Ione and she was replaced by Lydia who had been trained to perform the comedy "dinner table" routine in addition to working in the act. With the large assortment of acts Bobby tried to begin a small show of his own



Bobby in the spec of the 1983 Carson & Barnes Circus.

"Circus World on Parade" based out his winter quarters in Mission, Texas, but it didn't take off. The Gibbs and their animals appeared in Canada, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Hawaii in addition to all over the continental U. S. in venues large and small.

By 1983 Bobby felt the independent elephant business was in decline and he ended the elephant lease with D. R. Miller but he wasn't out of show business. He worked with a variety of shows in a variety of roles. He spent a season in charge of hoof stock on Carson & Barnes and worked elephants and other acts for George Carden. In the mid-80's Bobby worked for Dave Hale of 5-H Ranch developing a six camel liberty act. The camel act appeared at CWM and on Big Apple Circus the next summer. Gibbs and Hale split and Bobby worked for a while for Gopher Davenport.

Gibbs eventually returned to working with elephants for Donnie Johnson with, Mary, Judy, and Betty. By 1998, a heart attack and life events ended his career performing with elephants. He began driving a truck with a route that featured hauling bananas from the port in Galveston to a grocery warehouse in Dallas. He was a full-time truck

driver but the cab of his truck had the current circus periodicals and letters and a cell phone for the latest news. Bobby Gibbs last circus performance was as the show announcer for Donnie Johnson in Grand Forks, North Dakota in April 2004. Bobby died from a massive stroke on July 18, 2004.

Bobby Gibbs was a unique circus personality in his era. He wasn't the primary trainer of most of his acts but his knowledge and competence maintained, or enhanced, the animals' show behaviors. It was difficult to overlook a person of Bobby's size (six-feet tall and well over 300 pounds) in the ring. His style would normally feature the animals but he was at his best when he would perform in a comedy routine with the elephant Lydia or the pick-out mule when he could talk. Circus fans will likely remember Bobby's stories of his circus life more than his performances in the ring. Bobby would send his reviews of all the shows, big and small, he saw to *Circus Report* or *Backyard*. The tales from his truck hauling "monkey pickles" were well known in the circus world. Even though he was no longer a performer in the circus ring he was a popular feature at meetings of circus fans. Stories of his days on Gil Gray, swimming with a killer whale, the "breakfast club," and many, many more would roll out for hours. Though Bobby didn't let facts get in the way of a good story, they were fairly accurate and he loved to share them. His conviviality gave countless Gibbs' friends a favorite anecdote or experience.

The circus continues to change, especially for animal acts. Years from now circus historians will know that Robert "Bobby" Gibbs presented elephants and other animals in the last half of the 20th century but they may miss his best performance, telling stories in his inimitable style in the backyard.

Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART THIRTY-SEVEN

By David W. Watt

Editor's note. The dates listed are the dates the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Daily Gazette.

September 1, 1917

I am going to tell you more about the big show people that I met and incidents that happened in the business, some of which were many years ago.

One of the most interesting characters that has been one of the big drawing cards with the different shows for more than one-half a century is known in the business as a sideshow freak. I think his first appearance as a sideshow attraction was about 52 years ago when P. T. Barnum first discovered him and put him on exhibition for the first time in a museum in New York where he was known as "Zip," "What is it?" or Barnum's dog-faced boy.

Just how many years Zip remained with the Barnum show I am not certain, but I do know that he was the one big attraction of the sideshow for many years.

While he can talk but very little, he has quite a good understanding of what you say to him. Zip is supposed to be 72 years of age, although I see but very little change in him since he traveled with the Burr Robbins show in 1880.

At this time, a man by the name of Jace Robbins, who had made a fortune running the cook tent with the Barnum show, bought all privileges with the Burr Robbins show, and Jace brought Zip on from New York as his main attraction for the sideshow. In the smaller towns where the Burr Robbins show visited, Zip was certainly a drawing card.

I had quite a visit with Zip in the

side show and when I asked him if he recollects me at the time when he traveled with the Burr Robbins show, he simply smiled and nodded his head and said, "Yes, I know." These were the only words that Zip could utter while I was visiting him and I wonder if he still knew me or not.

Jace Robbins's home was in Brooklyn, New York, and for the two years that he had the privileges with the Burr Robbins show, he lost all that he had made in several years as caterer for the Barnum show, where he built up a reputation of running the finest cook tent in the business.

In the fall, and after the close of the Burr Robbins show, I had a long visit with Jace Robbins, who was down and out in the financial way. He said to me, "I hardly know where to go next." I said to him, "You have got a fortune left as you have the best reputation as the best caterer that ever traveled with a show, and without any question, you could go back to the Barnum show and recoup your lost fortune in a few years, for I am certain they would be glad to have you back."

Mr. Robbins left for his home in Brooklyn, and it was not long after that I received a letter from him saying that he had made a contract with Barnum & Bailey and was going back with them to his old work of running the cook tent, where he remained for several years and then went to the Buffalo Bill show in 1896. When the Buffalo Bill show visited Janesville, family and myself were the guests at a splendid dinner given

in the cook tent. At that time he told me that he was worth more money than ever before. As soon as he could get a few thousand dollars, he would invest it in Brooklyn real estate and will never take a chance again in the show business, but as long as he traveled, he would run the cook tent with the Buffalo Bill show.

I inquired as to his whereabouts last week, when the show was here, but no one seemed to have heard from him for several years.

On the 2nd and 3rd of September, the Barnum & Bailey show will show on the south side on what is known as the White City grounds. For the first time in 19 years, Chicago will be treated to a street parade of the greatest show on earth. The parade will leave 63rd Street at 9 o'clock in the morning when they expect to be constantly on the move for more than two hours.

To the average person, even in a great city like Chicago, a circus parade is as much or more a novelty as in a country town, for it is seldom that they see a circus parade in a city like that.

John McLaughlin, the master of transportation for the Barnum show, is an old-timer in the business and one of the most valuable men. When

Zip, "The original What is it." All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



the show was loading up here in the evening and the big team drivers were getting as close to the runs as possible, one of the team drivers yelled at the top of his voice at another driver, and as Mr. McLaughlin was standing near by, he said, "Keep your teams moving up to the runs, and put the soft pedal on that voice of yours." It occurred to the driver that McLaughlin meant what he said, for there was not another loud word while the show was unloading.

John is well versed in car repair work and carries two men with him for that purpose. The first thing that he sees to after arriving in town and unloading the show is that the cars are in perfect shape to leave for the next town. He never takes any chances of accidents of any kind. John commenced the show business with the old Adam Forepaugh show back in the 80's; at that time he commenced at the bottom of the ladder and worked up into the business until he was one of the most valuable men around the show. He is a large, unassuming man, talks but little, but it all has a meaning.

It is John McLaughlin's kind that always stays with the show and those are always the ones found at the top of the salary list.

It was just 30 years ago in August 1887 that the Adam Forepaugh show was to show for two weeks on the lakefront under canvas. On Saturday we were showing in South Bend, Indiana and in the morning the equestrian director posted a notice in the dressing rooms telling all performers to be on the lot in Chicago at 7:30 in the morning as the parade would start at 8:00 o'clock sharp.

The parade left the grounds on time and it was just 11:30 when it returned, making it a three and one-half hour march.

Very often I would go into the ticket wagon at 8:30 in the morning and not get out until 11:00 o'clock at night.

It is fair to say that all the people connected with the Barnum & Bailey show will be glad when the two-day showing is over in Chicago.

September 8, 1917

Hardly a day has passed since the Barnum show exhibited here two weeks ago that I am not asked what

the expense of running a show like that would be. There never was a time when that question was as hard to answer as it is today. Not only for the reason of the "high cost" of everything, but the extra help which they have to hire in every town. I find that the larger shows have much the same trouble. It seems to make but little difference how much they pay the average working man in many of the towns where they exhibit, for there is always someone ready to pay them more.

Many of the people who work with the circus are of the floating' population, who would just as lief (sic) live in any part of the country and are ready to drop off if the pay is better. Many of the larger shows several times during the season have been unable to put up the tops of the big tents, especially the menagerie. The best they can do is to park the cages and put up the sidewalls; and do the best they can. Several times during the summer the entire circus had to be given without a top. This makes it very hard to give the performances, especially that of the high aerial acts where they are turning double somersaults in the burning sun.

If there is any one business in the world where the average working man is loyal, it is with the circus under all conditions. There is not a show on the road today, if it comes to a showdown, that the performers, men and women, will not carry the planks, if necessary, in order to get the show out.

Gollmar and Patterson were showing in Beloit on Saturday, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon before they could get the show up, and it is fair to say that more than three-fourths of the people left for home which made the afternoon show a big loss.

Mr. Patterson is acting manager of the show and wherever it was possible, they hired all the help they could get in the town and paid them as high as \$2 and a ticket for the show



A tableau wagon in a Jess Willard 1917 parade.

for two or three hours of work.

While all the larger shows are having a big season, it is a question of how much money they will have in the bank on account of the extra expense.

A few days ago I had a letter from the 101 Ranch Wild West Show, which is owned and managed by Jess Willard, the heavyweight champion of the world.

The 101 Ranch showed in Detroit, Michigan on August 21st, the same date that the Barnum & Bailey show was at Janesville. They were crowded to the ring bank in the afternoon and at night they turned away more than 10,000 people, closing the ticket wagon at twenty minutes past seven. This is undoubtedly due to the drawing power of Jess Willard, the champion, for if there is any one thing the average American citizen worships, it is a champion. I think today that Jess Willard is the greatest drawing card that any show has had since the days of Jumbo with the Barnum & Bailey show and that of Louise Montague, the \$10,000 beauty.

If you can get a real drawing card with the circus that will fill the canvas afternoon and evening, it makes but little difference what the price is if you can afford to pay it.

It has only been a few years since Jess Willard worked on a farm in Kansas. Little did he dream at that time that in a few years he would have a big show of his own and that thousands of people would come only to get a glimpse of the champion. It is safe to say that he will hold it for many years as he takes the best of care of himself. He neither drinks nor



Jess Willard, champion boxer and circus owner.

smokes and is always attending to business.

The following letter will give you an idea of the many hardships that the big shows must encounter this season: "Business with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus still continues big, and at the present clip, the season of 1917 promises to be the biggest in the history of the show. The show is being moved this year in three or four sections and the fact that only this year three parades have been lost, speaks for itself.

"Although the show made its first trip through the West and Northwest in eight years, yet, with two exceptions, capacity business filled the six-pole top in every stand. On account of the midweek jump between Billings, Montana and Lewiston (177 miles), the performances were given without the big top, only the sidewalls being raised. The parade was given at 2 p.m. and the doors to the afternoon show opened at 3:15 p.m."

Edward Ballard, owner of the show, was away several days arranging for spur tracks to be installed at the winter quarters in West Baden. In the past, the cars were kept in Lafayette, Indiana during the winter months.

The government draft caught several employees in its net. Among them being George Pope of West Baden, Indiana who has charge of the front door.

Mae Wirth and the Wirth family

will not play a winter engagement in Cuba with the Santos & Artigas Cirrus, as announced a few weeks ago. Instead, the dainty equestrienne and the Wirth family will be seen in vaudeville, presenting a new offering which it is said will be a surprise in the way of staging an equestrian act.

The booking with the Santos & Artigas Circus was practically closed, but a hitch in the matter of stock came up at the last minute and very reluctantly the Wirths were compelled to decline the engagement.

September 15, 1917

Another old-timer by the name of James Jordon, boss canvas man for many years with many of the large shows, has been called by death.

"Big Jim," as he was known in the business in the palmy days, was one of the highest-class boss canvas men in the show business. While he was quiet and unassuming, he was thorough in his work. It is said of him that when a show arrived in town late that Jordon would build up his city of canvas faster than anyone else. I trooped with Mr. Jordon several years early in the 80's and many a time when the show would be late in getting in and be more than 10 o'clock when everything was on the show grounds, "Big Jim" would always walk to the front door and tell Adam Forepaugh that the show was ready to open.

There never was a question for the reason that "Big Jim" would organize his help in the spring and his best trusted employees were always putting up the seats, for it was there that the manager would always insist that the watchword in putting up the seats should always be "safety first."

But "Big Jim" has answered his call and passed over the "divide."

Many old-timers of the sawdust world will be shocked to learn of the death of James Jordon, veteran showman, who passed away at his home in Washington, Indiana Tuesday morning, August 28. He had been ailing for several years. Last year his mental faculties failed him

and his condition had gradually grown worse since that time, death being expected. He was 73 years old."

Mr. Jordon had been identified with shows for a period of forty-six years and was regarded as one of the best boss canvas men in the circus game. He began his show career with the Sells Brothers show when it had seven elephants. Later he went with the S. H. Barrett show (Lew Sells), then to the Sells Brothers show (the four Sells brothers); Adam Forepaugh's show (when Adam was living); John Robinson show (managed by John F. Robinson); Wallace shows (managed by B. E. Wallace); Hagenbeck show, when organized at Cincinnati by Lorenz Hagenbeck, John Havlin, Bode and others. He also toured Australia with the Sells Brothers show on the trip which required thirty days to cross over and thirty-one to return. He retired from the show business in 1909 and for several years served as a member of the Washington police department.

Mr. Jordon was born near Lafayette, Indiana September 11, 1844 and became a resident of Washington after his marriage forty-four years ago to Mary Buckley of Washington. The widow, one son, John, of Washington, who was connected with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus last season and one brother, William H. Jordon of Texas, survive him.

Funeral services were held Thursday morning from St. Simon's Catholic church of which he was a member, and burial was in St. John's cemetery.

Today, through the K-E-S-E releasing service, the Essanay feature built upon events in the life of the late Col. William Cody will be exhibited for the first time. All the historical events of this famous scout and soldier's life will be depicted and to make the scenes more realistic and thoroughly authentic, officers of the United States Army who saw service with Buffalo Bill will be seen in this screen debut of the idol of the American boy's dreams. The government is preserving a film of this picture for historical events so that the future American boys, and girls too, will be able to see what a "pony express" really was like; likewise the perils of the early frontier lays as they actually were.

The big top of the Sells-Floto circus was literally jammed with people at both performances Labor Day in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, located at Penn and Braddock Avenues. The opening pageant, representing the United States, aroused and on its toes, took the people by storm. As to the parade, one of the local dailies said: "The parade which passed through Pittsburgh's downtown streets was a ten-strike in the matter of novelty, freshness and patriotic appeal."

The numerous displays of the Stars and Stripes in the parade and performance of the Sells-Floto circus are one of the big features making a great hit with the big crowds in the different cities. To top, or rather end, the parade, along comes J. H. Del Vecho in the big steam "pianner," pounding out the familiar strains of *Columbia the Gem of the Ocean, My Country Tis of Thee*, and several other patriotic airs.

A few days ago friends of the late Col. Charles Selly erected a beautiful monument over his grave in the cemetery of his hometown, Elmira, New York.

Charles SeRy was an old-time clown, one of the highest-class gentlemen in the circus business. Although he worked afternoon and evening as a clown in the ring with the Adam Forepaugh and Barnum & Bailey shows, Charles was always making himself useful in the different capacities around the shows, such as looking after the newspapers, etc. In cases of big crowds, he would always be found at the front door helping out there. His usefulness around the shows, aside from his being in the ring as a clown, was much appreciated by the managements. Charles was a good dresser and a dean-cut gentleman whom you would always be proud to introduce to your friends. He was a little past 70 years of age and was laid to rest in the cemetery in his hometown, Elmira, where he spent his boyhood days.

Two weeks ago the Barnum & Bailey show exhibited on the south side of Chicago on what is known as the White City grounds, 63rd Street.

Thousands of people were turned away at every performance. While the great Ringling show was held in

the Coliseum four weeks last spring, some people thought it was questionable whether the two weeks would be a financial success. It only goes to show that these things are more for the best of managing advance agents to figure out. To the great amazement of many people, the engagement was a great success. On the opening day a long parade was staged on the south side, the same as that given in a small city and the vast crowd that gathered was evidence enough that the people around could see a big show under canvas, the same as they would see in the country. The people thought that a week under canvas in Chicago would be a great success with two days on the south side, two on the west and two on the north, for the average person would rather see a circus under canvas than see it in a building earlier in the season, long before the time for the circus to take to the road.

I believe the success of the Barnum & Bailey show for two days on the south side will lead them to try it another season in a different section of the city.

It was the World's Fair year, 1893, that the Barnum & Bailey show opened on the lake front in Chicago, for what they expected to be a long run, and all the advance advertising

The cover of the special Barnum & Bailey cookhouse menu for July 4, 1917.



cars were sidetracked there until it could be learned whether the engagement would be a success or not. I was Mr. Bailey's guest at the opening of the show there, which proved to be a dismal failure. It was only a few days later that Mr. Bailey made up his mind that he was "in bad" as the World's Fair was the only attraction that appealed to the people of Chicago at that time. At the ending of the first week Mr. Bailey called all the advance agents and car managers together and told them to take a hike for the country and find new towns. Even the greatest show on earth did not appeal to the people, and every afternoon and evening the show played to less than one fourth of the capacity of the house. This only goes to show that there is a little bit of guesswork with the successful attraction of the big show during the long season.

September 22, 1917

In the manner of running his show, Adam Forepaugh was different from any other managers of the larger shows. He never had a partner and always ran, what is known in the business, as the "privileges," including side shows, cook tents and in fact everything around the show went into the one melting pot. It was my business to issue all tickets and make a general settlement with the manager of each department and figure up the income from all the privileges as well as the main show for each day.

It was along in the late 80's that there was dissatisfaction among the workingmen as to the food supplies and the quality of the food in the cook tents. One day the men struck for better "grub," as they called it, but this was soon settled by Mr. Forepaugh by complying with all their demands.

This season there were about seventy-five Indians with the show, all of whom came from the reservations in the far west and were government subjects. All of them had to be accounted for to the government and sent back at the close of the show season.

None of the Indians could talk or understand our language, and it was only a week or ten days after the strike of the workingmen, on account

of the cook tent, that the Indians all gathered around Mr. Forepaugh and demanded better grub in their cook tents. Their interpreter explained, and Mr. Forepaugh replied in a quiet way and stated that only on account of the snow being in the East and too far away from the reservation and that he had not closed with them and sent them back to the reservation as he did not consider the Wild West part of the show either a drawing card or very much of an entertainment.

Said he, "You can tell them that if they are not satisfied with the way they are being used here, that they can close their engagement right here today and I will send them back to the reservation." This decision was unexpected to the poor Indians and if there was any one among them that was dissatisfied, they had better not travel with the circus. Immediately after the interpreter had told them Mr. Forepaugh's decision, they all made a run for the dressing room and there was no more fault found during the season as to their bill of fare in the cook tent.

I have been asked many times as to how old elephants are known to live and where most of them come from. I have been able to go back to the early days when the first elephants were brought to this country, where they come from and with what shows they traveled.

Nearly everybody knows an elephant. Nearly all seen in America are from India; only a few from Africa. The Indian elephant does all sorts of labor, pulling, pushing, carrying lumber, etc. The first elephant brought to this country was called Betsy, and was known as Old Bet. Bolivar traveled with Van Amburgh, season of '45. Pizarro, a troublesome animal, killed several of his keepers and died at North Adams, Massachusetts. Queen Anne died from drinking a barrel of ice water. Mogul was burned on shipboard. "Mlle. D'Jock" (sic) played in New York in 1834. Tippo Sultan was in this country in '36 and '37. Siam died at Zanesville, Ohio from chills in a storm. Old Romeo, a most vicious ani-

mal, died in Somerstown, New York in '34 or '35. Tippo Saib, a well-trained elephant, came to America in '32 and gave a performance of what in circuses is termed La Perche Equipoise, and died at the Van Amburgh winter quarters in Indiana. Hannibal, a very large animal, died at Cumberland, Maryland in 1856. Van Amburgh & Co. during the fifty-five years of their establishment owned about fifty elephants, ranging in size from Hannibal to Major, the smaller measuring but thirty-five inches in height.

As far back as I can recollect, nearly every show in the country had as a sideshow attraction a snake charmer with all kinds of large and small snakes, some of them boa constrictors, 12 or 14 feet long and weighing some 400 or 500 pounds. Dealers in New York brought most of the large ones here from across the water. The smaller and more dangerous ones were captured in this country. The capture of snakes for show purposes takes place mostly away down in the heart of the unsettled parts of Mexico.

A party of trained snake hunters, numbering more than 100 persons, go out into the wilderness and divide its members into several parties. The camps of these groups are spread out in a circle covering many miles. The headquarters camp is in the center. Here is also located the camp hospital for the treatment of those who are bitten by the reptiles. At daybreak the hunters start out accompanied by their trained dogs. Just as soon as the dogs start to bark, the Mexicans start on the run. Should you follow, you will witness an interesting sight. Mr. Rattlesnake at bay with rattles going and head in air, he is sure

game, trying his best to strike the dogs. But both dogs and hunters are wary and the snake is soon captured, placed in a sack and thrown over the back of a Mexican. Then on to the next one. This goes on until the sacks are full or until it becomes time to report to the main camp where the snakes are transferred from the sacks to boxes and piled up some distance from the camp. It is dangerous to have a captive rattler too near to your sleeping quarters as its rattling in some cases will call its mate and rattlers are not pleasant visitors to receive in the middle of the night. Some of the hunters start out in the night and many rattlers are captured in this way. From the main camp the snakes are transported by mule train to Matamoras, Mexico, where they are exported to the King ranch at Snakeville, Texas, a suburb of Brownsville. Then comes the job of unpacking them and getting them into their dens where they are fed until such time as they are wanted as attractions for some sideshow, zoo or park. Iguanas (Chinese dragons) and large snakes such as anacondas, boa constrictors, etc. are generally imported from Japan and Central America.

The Nebraska state fair at Lincoln, long looked forward to by members of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus, is now history, but it shall never be forgotten by the H. W. troopers or the people who attended it. The fair ran for five days beginning September 3 and ending September 7, and it is said was the greatest event in point of attendance that the Nebraska State Fair Association ever

A Hagenbeck-Wallace eighteen horse hitch at the Nebraska State Fair in 1917.



staged. While each day was a big one, the banner day of them all was Wednesday when it is estimated 75,000 people attended. No small amount of credit for the success of the fair is given the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus which, it is needless to say, proved a powerful magnet.

That the show gave entire satisfaction was evidenced by the many complimentary remarks made after the performances. The performances were staged in the open air directly in front of the grandstand, making striking appearances. The wild west and side show, on the outside, all did an immense business each day. The show left Lincoln Friday night, September 7, for Atchison, Kansas, where two turn-a-ways were re-recorded next day. Oklahoma City on the 19th also proved a big stand. It would not be surprising to hear of many other state fairs trying out the circus as a free attraction next year.

During the stay of the Ringling circus at San Francisco, the Wirth family learned of the death in battle on the French front of Harry Young, former wardrobe man with the Wirth circus in Australia and of Stanley Richmond, brother of Lexington Richmond, elephant man for the Wirths. They also learned that Ollie West, transportation man for the Wirths, is now with the colors in France. Lexington Richmond arrived in France the day after his brother was killed.

September 29, 1917

One evening last week, I chanced to meet half a dozen old friends, and after talking over different matters for a short time, our conversation finally drifted into the show business.

One or two finally took the stand that the shows of today in general have not advanced with the times. In fact, they thought they had deteriorated and gone back, rather than advanced. After discussing the matter pro and con for some time, I could



The cover of the Kiralfy Fall of Babylon spectacle.

see that it would last for hours and we would finally drop back to where we commenced and would amount to but little.

But after witnessing the great Barnum & Bailey show that exhibited here this summer and seeing the greatest aggregation of athletes that I had ever seen, how a man could take such a stand as they did, I could not see. So far as I know, there has been but one kind of show business that was a failure and that was the great spectacular business, like the "Fall of Babylon" and a few others of the same nature put up by the Kiralfy brothers. While they were the greatest producers of the spectacular kind that the world has ever seen or realized, for the reason that the expense was so great, it was impossible to make it a success. But in all other lines of show business, they have certainly been advancing year after year, and New York capitalists are busy getting the great New York Hippodrome in readiness for next winter's run. When it is opened to the

public, there will be many surprises given the people, for there will be the greatest congress of the world's great athletes that has ever been gotten together. People who take the stand that they do, that the show business is not advancing, it would seem to me that it was high time they would shake the John Dillon and Dan Rice ideas out of their heads and realize, as the old darkey said, "that the world do move." As for the circus game, I think I know something about it, and it has certainly advanced year after year.

The circus stands alone as a form of entertainment that reaches the whole human family with equal interest. Another point of advantage of the circus for amusement generally is that it does not depend upon a knowledge of any tongue. There is no dialogue to follow and no text or story to understand. Eyes to see and ears to hear are the essentials for perfect pleasure. The French Canadian who cannot speak English and the Mexican who can only talk Spanish, are as fond of the circus as the American born. In short, the circus seems to be possessed of that strange something which makes the whole world kin and wondrous kind.

Of the many types of circus-goers and the habit is pronounced in all sections and among all classes the Indian is the most striking. He will travel further, endure more privations and skimp himself harder to get the price of admission than any other human being, probably in the world. More than this, he really enjoys the circus, even better than the Negro, though he doesn't make a fuss over it. With the Negro, circus going is almost a disease. He will sell anything he owns, not excepting the most necessary things in life, to get money to see the elephant. The same may be said of the Indian, only more so. He will barter off his papoose, his squaw or even his most cherished possession, his horse, to get a ticket.

After these comes the Chinaman. The Mexican too is prompt to turn out on show day with all his kith and kin and bedecked with all the colors of the evening sky. The laziest greaser on the Texas border who never paid a debt in his life bobs up proudly on circus day with his fifty cents, though nobody knows where he got it.

In the far west the Ringling circus is known among the Indians as "the Heap Big Brothers Show." The red man waits for its yearly appearance as confidently as he awaits the coming of spring. The Indians come from as far as 200 miles on horseback, and even on foot, starting on their long journey days before the circus date and arriving in the morning of the day of the show. On circus day it is a case of every man for himself with the Indians. The lord of the tepee brings enough trinkets in the shape of moccasins and bows and arrows to peddle around town and in this way gets enough for his admission ticket. His squaw brings willow baskets and has to hustle for her own ticket. They generally come in couples astride of a pony, and if the market is overcrowded with Indian relics, they will sell the nag.

When the show trains arrive in these western towns early in the morning, 200 and 300 tents have already been pitched by the Indians, some of whom have arrived the night before. Their little colony is almost as interesting as the circus itself. It is a veritable bazaar of relics and papoose exhibitions. While the squaws are getting breakfast, the children are playing games and the chiefs are taking their knickknacks to the market. They are the first ones after the doors of the tents open to land on the blue planks. They fill a good part of the arena and they never move during the entire performance. Applause is unknown to them. They make as little show of enthusiasm as their brothers in wood in front of the white man's cigar store. If the trick elephant were to climb the center pole, they would no doubt enjoy the performance, but they would make no more show of surprise than if they were molded of clay. If the performing mule were to walk on the hippodrome track and make a circus announcement in the Indian tongue,

they would only grunt.

Along the Pacific Coast, Chinamen are among the firm friends of Ringling Brothers. Like the Indians, they are good patrons of this particular show. At least 25,000 Chinamen saw the performances in San Francisco last season. The merchants gave box parties, the men wearing rich, embroidered gowns and the women costly silks cut, not in the form of dresses, but as a man wears his broadcloth. The jeweled stickpins that held the women's tightly drawn hair in a graceful fold at the nape of the neck, the filigree neck chains and the sparkling bracelets and ear ornaments, added to the sheen silks and satins, made a theatrical picture of these Chinamen's parties not soon to be forgotten by the traveling showman. The Chinaman is as undemonstrative as the Indian. He expresses appreciation for the performance by attending time after time. Though the Chinamen and Indians are undemonstrative, the cowpunchers, Mexicans and Negroes are as noisy as their throats and hands will allow. When one of the big shows tours the south the cotton fields are practically deserted. Every Negro within a radius of 160 miles of towns where the circus is to exhibit has to see the performance if he has to sell his coat to do it. The applause and laughter of these child-like people is deafening, and the clowns are the chief cause. The Negro never tries to dodge the "under 12" clause, but pays for his children if they are a day over the age limit without a murmur. It is often no small drain on his finances to do this, for usually he heads a family of half a dozen or more youngsters.

October 6, 1917

A few weeks ago I received a poem written by an old friend of mine with whom I trooped years ago. He was an old performer and had been a high-class performer in the show business for many years, but his arduous work and Father Time had told on him and suddenly one day he failed to do his act that had been so easy for him before. This carried me back many years. In fact my early career in the business with a family by the name of O'Brien was traveling with the show.



Fred O'Brien, acrobat and leaper.

The O'Brien family consisted of the father, Fred O'Brien, the mother and two boys. The mother and two boys were aerial artists and the father was a champion leaper and tumbler. In fact, he was the best somersault man in the business. This was in the days when they would bring in two or three elephants and many of the leapers, perhaps twenty or twenty-five in number, would turn single somersaults from the springboard over the elephants. The old clown would yell out, "Bring in more elephants." When he was told that there were no more, he would say, "Bring in the camels and horses," until there were seven o'lit of them that would be standing up close together. Large mattresses were placed on the other side of the animals for the leapers to alight on. After all the performers and athletics had gone over their acts, the announcer would appear and say that Fred O'Brien, the world's greatest athlete, would attempt to turn a double somersault over a herd of animals. At that time Fred O'Brien was one of the big features with the show, and when he ran down the incline and sprang upon the springboard, he turned his double somersault and alighted standing up, and the applause from the audience was deafening.

Fred O'Brien at that time was a little past the middle age and many of the people around the show had been talking quietly among themselves that they could see that Fred was failing and that his work was getting much harder than it had been before. All the performers were paid every

Wednesday, and when I was ready to close the ticket wagon for the afternoon. If there were any of the performers or managers for any reason had not been there to get their salary, I would close up the wagon and take their salary back to the dressing room.

Among those who had not been to the wagon was Fred O'Brien, the great leaper.

When I entered the dressing room Fred was sitting on his trunk, and I could see in a moment that there was something wrong. I asked him if he was not feeling well, and it was then with tears in his eyes that he told me that in turning his last somersault he missed the mattress and hurt his back. "But," I said, "I am sure you will be right back tomorrow." He would not try to do his act that night.

Little did Mr. O'Brien think that he had turned his last somersault. He kept on working and only turned single somersaults for the balance of the season. On account of his being with the show for so many years and being a big drawing card, he drew his full salary every Wednesday until the close of the show. At that time Fred O'Brien drew a salary of \$200 a week, but that was his last season, for he had seen his day and when he went seeking another position the next year, his former salary was cut several times in two.

In his work he lived up to the last fatal leap without knowing that he had grown old and that he was nearing the end of his famous career as the greatest double somersault leaper in the circus business. It was only a year or two later that his health commenced to fail and less than a year later he died and was buried in the cemetery down east where he had spent his boyhood days.

The big circuses as they exist today are wonderful institutions—cosmopolitan cities, people with mechanics, artisans and workers who daily erect, decorate, dismantle and transport great cities. Over 500 souls live in the traveling community of a great circus. Almost every profession is represented. It has a postmaster, doctors, veterinary, newspaper, hotel keepers, lawyers, detectives, bookkeepers, auditors, carpenters, wagon makers, blacksmiths,

electricians, physical directors, baseball team, tent makers, painters, civil, steam and electrical engineers—in fact, everything found in any city.

The transportation of this enterprise is a magnificently accomplished task. No other institution can boast of a better working system. Four big trains of double length cars are loaded and unloaded every twenty-four hours. Every article, even to the most insignificant guy-rope stake, must be in its exact place; otherwise the system would be disrupted and its working efficiency spoiled. Time is ever a precious article around a circus. Countless articles and almost every form of life, all of great value, must be given the closest attention in the shortest space of time. Every attaché has a place and belongs to some certain department. Each department has a competent superintendent who is responsible for the proper working and care of his section. Thus must the daily movement

ing letter tells of the reception accorded Mr. Gentry at his old hometown: "That wide-awake, honest, big-hearted (a hundred and one things could be said about him) showman, Henry B. Gentry, president and general manager of the Sells-Floto circus, played his hometown, Bloomington, Indiana several days ago and what a beautiful tribute was paid him by the town folk. It was not a warm welcome, but a red-hot reception. The dailies came out with special H. B. Gentry, Sells-Floto editions and another unusual thing was the playing of the university chimes in honor of the progressive showman."

The following letter was written Mr. Gentry by John W. Cravens of the Indiana university: "This evening, beginning at a quarter of seven, a university chimes concert will be given in your honor. One of the things that will be played will be I know that today your mind is filled with happy thoughts of your old home. Under the university rules the chimes are played only on university occasions. Your unfailing friendship for the university and the town makes it especially appropriate that this rule be laid aside for a day and the concert will be given in your honor. You have thousands of friends in this community who have watched with pride the progress that you have made in your chosen work and none of these persons rejoices more than I do in your success. In the rush of this afternoon and tonight, I may not have a chance to greet you personally and I take pleasure in writing you this personal note. With kindest regards, I am."

October 13, 1917

That there is a vast difference in organizing and equipping a big show today compared with that of thirty years ago was plain to be seen among the big shows this summer. During my time with the Adam Forepaugh show, it was my business to be in Philadelphia some two or three weeks before the opening of the show. I had what was called "my horse and buggy," which I used to go shopping with every morning, buying material and all kinds of equipment for the show, such as blacksmith's materials, ropes and other articles. It was easy work in those days, for I knew just



H. B. GENTRY
General Manager
SELLS-FLOTO CIRCUS

of the great circuses be carefully watched to protect the large capital involved.

One of the best compliments ever paid to any circus manager was the one accorded to Henry B. Gentry, manager of the Sells-Floto show, at his old home in Bloomington, Indiana, a few days ago. The follow-



Emil Schweyer, wild animal trainer on Hagenbeck-Wallace.

where to go to get the things needed.

We had harness makers, blacksmiths and other mechanics around the show. When they would give me an order, there never was a question asked, for the reason that they knew what was needed around the show. Some three or four days before the opening of the show, I would tell Dan Taylor, the boss canvas man, that I would like to meet his men at work two days before the show in order to get their names and give them numbers, for each employee had a number on the payroll. When these men would line up in the spring, more than 80 percent of them would come to the ticket wagon with smiles on their faces and say, "Dave, we are glad to see you back on the wagon again," for they were old-timers, as they were called. The next evening Billy Connors, boss canvas man and hostler, would line up his men and the percentage of old drivers would even be larger than that of the canvas men, especially among what is known as the big team drivers, and those were the men who had been with the show for many years.

Occasionally, for some reason or other, we would get a few big team drivers from the Barnum or Sells circus who had been with the show for many years, but the percentage of old-timers with the show for the last year or two, was greatly diminished. In many towns we would lose from twelve to thirty men in a day, so that before the season was over, there were comparatively few old-timers with the show. The bosses in the different departments were only too glad to hire any kind of a man to help them out. The largest percentage of old-timers in the departments of the

shows were the big team drivers, which they had to have and were willing to pay them the price they asked.

To be sure, the heads of the departments and especially the general manager has more or less to do with the keeping of the men. In my time the highest class manager that I ever knew was John A. Forepaugh, nephew of Adam Forepaugh. While he was exacting with his men, he was never unreasonable and was always on the job. He was the first man on the lot in the morning and the last to leave it at night. He traveled in a private car with his wife and considered himself a workingman with the show and was a man who naturally drew the working class around him. Many times in the spring when the old-timers would commence to arrive, many of them would say to me, "Dave, I hope Mr. Johnny will be manager again this year." It is just as hard, to my way of thinking, to get a good manager for a circus as it is to get a good, capable bank president.

Charles Gollmer of Baraboo, who until a year ago was one of proprietors of the Gollmer show, recently went to Jackson, Mississippi, where he has taken up the management of the Hagenbeck-Wallace show. That Mr. Gollmar is a capable man in every way goes without saying. He was one of the acting managers of the Gollmar show for many years, and Ed Ballard, owner of the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, is to be congratulated in securing the services of Mr. Gollmar.

Arthur Badkin, formerly head advance man for Tom Powell's minstrels and more recently agent for the Hagenbeck-Wallace show, was one among the thousands who left for the Rockford training camp Wednesday as a result of the working of the army draft. Mike Badkin, Arthur's father, and I had been close friends for many years, the father having been a trusted employee of the Adam Forepaugh show for many years.

A fight between a performing lion and Emil Schweyer was a feature

not on the program of the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus in Dallas, Texas, recently. The trouble occurred when one of the lions in the act became unruly. Schweyer fought the beast for fifteen minutes before it would perform its turn. When the audience saw that the trainer had triumphed, there was an outburst of applause, which was deafening.

The ladies with all the different shows are doing their "bit" to help out Uncle Sam. The ladies with the Barnum show have formed a knitting club and everyday finds them knitting for the soldiers. Every few days or maybe a week, a package is sent to some soldier "somewhere in France." A weekly collection is taken up and with the money yam, cigarettes, tobacco and other useful articles are purchased.

That the circus business is coming back to its own enjoyment and prosperity, more especially perhaps in the larger cities, was never better shown in circus business than it was this fall. A short time ago the great Barnum & Bailey show gave two performances in Nashville, Tennessee, with a big eight-pole top, the largest one ever raised. All available extra seats were utilized and people were turned away at both performances. A few days later Jess Willard with the 101 Ranch Buffalo Bill show arrived, and, of course, thousands of Nashville people were anxious to see the great champion boxer. This show also played to a capacity house in the afternoon and thousands were unable to gain admittance to the evening performance. A few days later the Hagenbeck-Wallace show followed. This show also played to a big business in Nashville. Papers came out and stated without question Nashville could easily stand another show this season and that the fourth one would be greeted by two large audiences. Even small towns through the southern country have been patronizing the big shows generously, towns that heretofore were passed up. Although I have not received the closing dates of all the big shows, the Patterson & Gollmar show closed the season on October 8 after a very successful season and went into winter quarters at Peola, Kansas, the home of Mr. Patterson.

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